

Natural Family Planning ≠ Rhythm

Calendar Rhythm was the earliest form of systematic Natural Family Planning (NFP) and was quite popular in the 1930s and onward. It was a method based on medical discoveries in the 1920s that ovulation occurred roughly two weeks before the next menstruation.

The Calendar Rhythm method had a very easy formula based on a normal 28-day cycle with ovulation around Day 14:

Shortest cycle minus 19 = Last day of Phase I.
 Longest cycle minus 10 = First day of Phase 3.

The woman's fertile time, therefore, was between these two days.

As an example, for a woman whose cycle lengths were between 26 and 30 days, her fertile time were Days 8-19 (26 - 19 = 7 AND 30 - 10 = 20).

This actually was very effective as long as the woman had extremely regular cycles close to 28 days. The problem is, many women don't.

Modern NFP is not based on a theoretical cycle length, but rather, takes into account a woman's current signs of fertility on a day-by-day basis. With NFP, a woman records her daily fertility signs and then the couple interprets those signs to determine her fertile or infertile status. With this approach, the couple is watching as the fertile times come and go, and base their actions on the current status.

It's easy to see the difference between a Rhythm approach and an NFP approach on a sample chart:

