

FAQ for NFP for the Diocese of Wichita (“20 Questions”)

1. What is Natural Family Planning (NFP)

Natural Family Planning is an effective, scientifically based method of family planning that treats fertility as a normal, healthy process. NFP is based upon observations of changes in the woman’s body that reliably reflect her fertility or infertility. The couple using NFP interprets this information and then either has intercourse during the fertile time or abstains during the fertile time, depending upon their family planning intention.

Over a century ago, scientists discovered cyclic changes in cervical mucus and their relation to ovulation. In the 1920s, scientists identified the temperature rise that signals ovulation. But it wasn't until the 1950s, that scientists developed programs to teach others how to observe and interpret these fertility signs.

2. What are the signs of fertility observed for NFP?

Couples using NFP may observe changes in the woman’s cervical mucus, her awareness of changes in vaginal sensations, changes in the cervix itself as well as changes in her waking temperature. Additionally, there are some slight indicators known as secondary signs that may be observed. One that many women are familiar with is intermenstrual pain (mittelschmerz).

3. When should we learn NFP?

We usually recommend that you start taking classes and charting at least four to six months before you get married. Many single women have also taken an NFP class simply to gain more knowledge about their own body! There's no such thing as starting too early. If you're already married and would like to learn NFP - better now than never! :-) Contact the Office to get started today. For pregnant couples, we encourage you to start learning in the 7th or 8th month of pregnancy.

4. How do we learn NFP in the Diocese of Wichita?

The first step in learning is to register for a class, usually referred to as an, “Introductory Session.” You can register for a class by calling the Office of Marriage and Family Life, 316-685-5240. You can also see the class schedule at www.catholicdioceseofwichita.org/nfp.

5. How much does it cost?

The cost is based on a sliding fee scale and no one is ever turned away due to cost. Remember, this a method you can use throughout your whole procreative life. You are never prevented from employing the knowledge of your gift of fertility. (priceless!)

6. How do you actually learn it?

Learning NFP is a process. This education may be done in a class situation, one-to-one instruction, or through correspondence or online course. Whatever format is utilized, instruction may consist of a presentation, learning activities, and personalized follow-up with chart review. Simply reading a book, or even attending a class without personal attention, is not adequate.

The absolute best way to learn NFP is with a trained instructor. Some internet information, books or DVD methods are available, but they do not provide the best learning environment. Accuracy is crucial when learning family planning. Accuracy is best achieved with an instructor. Personal attention is a very important component of instruction. This may take place face-to-face, over the phone, or in written or email correspondence. It is critical for a couple to learn from a certified NFP Provider.

7. Are there different methods of NFP?

NFP methods are grouped according to which signs of fertility are being observed and charted. They are as follows: the basal body temperature method (BBT) monitors changes in a woman's temperature when she wakes up each morning; the cervical mucus method (more commonly called "Ovulation Method" or "OM") monitors changes in a woman's cervical mucus; the Sympto-Thermal Method (STM) combines observations of temperature and cervical mucus with other indicators, such as changes in the cervix and secondary fertility signs; and the Sympto-Hormonal Method (SHM), which is similar to the STM, includes the self-detection of reproductive hormones in the urine with the assistance of an ovulation predictor kit or fertility monitor.

8. What Methods are offered in the Diocese of Wichita?

The methods are outlined in the NFP brochure, but are also listed here. There are actually 2 different "methods;" The Ovulation Method and the Sympto-Thermal Method. -Of these two, we have 4 providers:

The Billings Ovulation Method® - the original Method developed by Drs. John and Lyn Billings more than 60 years ago, still being taught and practiced by millions of couples in more than 100 countries. The method continues with ongoing scientific verification. It is easy to learn and simple to use.

Creighton Model / FertilityCare System™ The CrMS relies upon the standardized observation and charting of biological markers that are essential to a woman's health and fertility. The CrMS allows a woman to unravel the mysteries of the menstrual cycle and assist the CrMS-trained physician in diagnosing underlying problems through NaProTechnology.

Family of the Americas Ovulation Method the Ovulation Method is based on teaching couples the significance of a natural secretion signaling fertility that all women can be taught to recognize and couples can use in effectively planning their families.

Couple to Couple League Sympto-Thermal Method CCL has a three-fold approach to teaching NFP which includes the Sympto Thermal Method of NFP, the moral underpinnings of the NFP decision and the promotion of exclusive and continued breastfeeding and its effects on fertility.

9. What's involved in follow-up?

In follow-up, the NFP Provider reviews the client's chart for correct and consistent charting and interpretation. There is a dialogue about how the observations are being made and the correct understanding of definitions and rules are clarified. It is also an opportunity for the client to ask

questions, receive information appropriate for the specific cycling pattern being experienced, and be encouraged and supported in the practice of NFP.

10. How much abstinence is involved?

Because each woman's cycling pattern is just a little different, and each cycle is unique, there is no hard and fast rule about the amount of abstinence. For a woman who has typical cycling, the average number of days of fertility is about 9-12. It is important to keep in mind that studies have consistently shown that couples using NFP to plan their family have as many (or more!) acts of intercourse during a cycle as other couples, it is just distributed differently.

11. How does periodic abstinence affect the couple's relationship?

There is often a concern that periodic abstinence will have a negative impact on the couple's relationship. In fact, in a five country trial, the WHO found that "marital friction" as a result of periodic abstinence was uncommon in 80-99 percent of cycles according to both men and women. In this same study, over 95 percent of both men and women rated their satisfaction with NFP as good or excellent. Couples using NFP report increased and enhanced communication, increased self-esteem, and enhanced spirituality.

12. Does NFP really work? How effective is it?

Modern methods of NFP have been shown to be highly effective with method effectiveness figures ranging from 97-99.9 percent. Couples who do *not* follow all the instructions for avoiding pregnancy all the time: 80%-90%.

Since NFP methods are not contraception, their effectiveness works both ways—for achieving and postponing pregnancy. When couples wish to achieve a pregnancy they can time sexual intercourse to the fertile window of the menstrual cycle, thereby optimizing the possibility of becoming pregnant. According to the Paul VI Institute, 76% of couples using the ovulation method (Creighton Model) and having normal fertility will achieve pregnancy in their first cycle of using fertile days for intercourse. This means that couples using NFP can accurately time conception and their due date to within about a month, 76% of the time. Those rates go up to 90% after 3 cycles and 98% after six cycles.

For those with "compromised fertility" 20-40% will become pregnant within six to twelve months of use by charting alone. When couples receive medical treatment along with charting, their pregnancy rate up to 80%. Numbers may vary with the different methods.

13. What are the Benefits of NFP?

NFP....

- Is healthy
- Has no harmful side effects
- Is comparatively inexpensive
- Recognizes fertility as a gift, a normal healthy process, not a disease or side effect of sexuality
- Does not interfere with future fertility

- Is a shared method which requires mutual responsibility & self-control
- Empowers women with greater scientific knowledge of their bodies
- Increases communication between spouses regarding intimacy, family planning, & more
- Deepens intimacy & renews romance.
- Enhances the spiritual aspect of marriage by planning your family in a way that is not contrary to love and the Church's teachings.

14. **When is it appropriate to use NFP to avoid or postpone pregnancy?**

Natural Family Planning is all about knowledge; specifically, knowledge of fertility and the workings of a woman's body. This knowledge can be used to either achieve or avoid/postpone pregnancy. The knowledge that comes with NFP can equip couples to grow in greater appreciation for each other's fertility, for the gifts of sexuality and of marriage, and for the sacredness of every human person. In fact, knowing more about the most profound mystery of what makes us human can also point us toward knowing more about the profound mystery of God.

NFP can help a couple to grow in the virtues needed for a successful marriage: self-control, mutual respect, and sacrificial love, to name a few. It also allows a couple the opportunity to involve God in the process of discerning what is best for their family.

Our primary response to God's love is always one of generosity for who He is and for all he has given us. Generosity, first and foremost, should take the form of being open to whatever God's will is for our lives and for our vocation to marriage and family life. *Does God want us to have another child at this time?* is a question every NFP-practicing couple is able to ask themselves in every cycle, and act accordingly. *Is there a serious reason for us to postpone a pregnancy right now?* As the Church document, *Humanae Vitae*, states: "With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time (HV 10)."

Couples are charged with the responsibility to prayerfully and carefully seek God's will for their family at all times. But figuring this out can be a daunting task. It is wise to seek good counsel from someone who supports the teachings of the Church and who has a good understanding of the struggles the couple faces. A faithful priest is a good person to begin with. We also recommend two articles that can assist with this discernment process: *Discerning Just and Serious Reasons for Postponing Pregnancy* and *What the Church Teaches on the Moral Spacing and Limiting of Births by Spouses*.

Above all, trust that God has a plan for your marriage.

15. **I looked at the schedule, and can't make any of the current classes. Is there another option?**

Yes. First, contact the Office of Marriage and Family Life. There are teachers willing to schedule additional classes to fit your schedule. Or, you may want to take a home study course. [Couple to Couple League](#) offers the home study course through www.ccli.org

16. My physician does not seem to understand my chart. What do I do?

Amazingly, many medical professionals do not receive training or much information about modern methods of NFP unless they seek it out specifically. You can ask your NFP teacher for assistance in explaining your chart or you can seek out a physician with specialized training in NFP.

17. Do you know NFP-friendly Medical Professionals?

Yes! Please see the list of NFP Medical Consultants at <http://catholicdioceseofwichita.org/nfp>
--> See also One More Soul's Comprehensive NFP-only Physician List.

18. What reasons support using Natural Family Planning?

Biological reasons, such as one's health and concern about the side effects of artificial methods, including sterilization. Actual quotes from some of our clients:

"I read the insert that came in my wife's birth control pill packet and realized that I didn't want her to take the risk of these consequences just to make sex convenient. At that point, I said that we had to find a better way. NFP is that better way for us."

"I started Depo-Provera to simplify my life, but I gained weight and suffered depression. I decided that I wanted to be hormone-free...after all if I objected to hormones in meat, why should I take them?"

"If I wanted my garden to be chemical free, why didn't I have the same concern for my own ecology? NFP has been a wonderful experience in understanding myself."

Psychological reasons, such as the positive interaction that can occur as the couple manages family planning together. One "side effect" is that 70 percent of NFP couples who were surveyed indicated that the practice of NFP increased their communication level.

"I never thought that after twenty years of marriage that I would ever feel the intensity of desire for my wife I felt when we were first married. Yes, we still loved each other, but there was something missing. I just chalked it up to being older, having kids, being together for twenty years. Something amazing happened when we learned NFP – the abstinence brought back the freshness, the anticipation, we had enjoyed when we were first married."

"We were using a barrier method of family planning before NFP, but I hated suiting up for sex. It seemed wrong to establish a barrier from the person you were to be as intimate as possible with—it contradicted the unity of the act. NFP is so much more spontaneous and congruent with what sex means in a committed, loving relationship."

Moral and ethical reasons, such as the recognition that some forms of contraception actually interfere with the implantation process. These methods may act as abortifacients.

"I had heard that hormonal contraceptives can cause really early abortions by preventing implantation, so I asked my doctor about it. She said that this isn't true. However, the more I read, the more it seemed that there really is the possibility that this is true. I'm not willing to take that chance. <http://archfami.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/9/2/126>"

"I think it is an injustice for me, as a man, to ask my wife to negate her biology just so she can be sexually available without concern for pregnancy. Justice requires that we both share in the responsibility for family planning. NFP fulfilled this for us."

Philosophical and religious reasons, such as faithfulness to one's religious beliefs and an understanding of sexuality as comprised of a unitive and procreative dimension – inseparable parts of a whole. NFP allows the couple to respect this part of who they are and to practice responsible parenthood.

“NFP helped me appreciate the cycle of life. It makes me very thankful that there is a God who has made this – how wonderfully it all works together. As Psalm 139 says, we are fearfully and wonderfully made! I feel good about NFP because it allows me to live congruently with Catholic teaching. I'm not putting an obstacle between myself and my relationship with God, and my relationship with God has gotten closer.”

19. **What's difference between NFP and Contraception**

There is a big difference between NFP and contraception. NFP, as opposed to contraception, does not deliberately frustrate the procreative potential of sex. Every act of intercourse using NFP is open to the possible transmission of life. We do not withhold our fertility from each other when coming together as two people in one body. Using contraception separates the gift of fertility from the act of intercourse in marriage. It leaves intercourse sterile and self-serving.

So, NFP is morally acceptable while contraception is actually sinful and never morally right. NFP is unique because it enables its users to work with the body rather than against it. Fertility is viewed as a gift and reality to live, not a problem to be solved. Ultimately, NFP respects God's design for married love.

20. **What about spontaneity?**

Most of the time, "spontaneity" in sex is itself a myth!

Modern culture is awash in sexual messages. This may fool us into thinking that "everyone" is having sex as often as possible and always "spontaneously!" Even married couples may fall into this trap. Or, they may think that their sex lives would be more spontaneous "if only" their spouse wanted sex at the same time they did. The reality is that most marital sexual encounters are planned, or at least happen in situations favorable to love-making that are setup by agreement regardless of the family planning method used. Otherwise, in the press of daily life with jobs, household chores, social commitments, children's demands, etc., a husband and wife would rarely have sex!

It's not necessarily bad news that married couples often plan on a time to have sexual relations. A loving invitation given in advance means a time of healthy anticipation for both husband and wife. For NFP couples who are trying to postpone a pregnancy, such an invitation in the days of sexual abstinence can mean living a "chaste courtship" that will be followed by a "mini-honeymoon." NFP couples often talk about how the times of sexual abstinence have helped them deepen their expressions of love for each other through loving gestures, "date nights," significant conversations and so forth. This is not to say that the times of abstinence are not challenging. They can be! With a positive attitude and living through it together, husband and wife can use periodic sexual abstinence to grow individually and as a couple. Such self-mastery fosters authentic freedom where one's desires are put in service to the other—a necessary ingredient for marriage! Real sexual spontaneity depends upon real freedom—and NFP fosters such freedom.

References and Resources for NFP

- <http://catholicdioceseofwichita.org/nfp>
- <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/natural-family-planning/what-is-nfp/frequently-asked-questions.cfm>
- <http://www.madisondiocese.org/Ministry/MarriageandFamily/NaturalFamilyPlanning/FAQ.aspx>
- <https://www.nwfs.org/couples-a-singles/natural-family-planning/faqs.html>
- Humanae Vitae (Love Giving Life Giving never separated) http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html
- Donum Vitae (Artificial Reproductive technologies addressed) http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html
- Dignitas Personae (Stem cell research and other issues pertaining to life) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html