

# FERTILITY AWARENESS

# CONTRACEPTIVE METHODS

## FACT SHEET

### What are fertility awareness methods?

These are methods where a woman becomes aware of the signs of fertility. She learns to detect when she is most likely to get pregnant.

This information can then be used to:

- increase the chance of conception by knowing when your fertile phase is
- reduce the risk of pregnancy by avoiding sexual intercourse when you are fertile

### How does it work?

It works by learning to recognise the signs of when you are fertile (ovulation). The most useful signs of ovulation are regular monthly changes, such as cervical mucus and body temperature.

Many women will be familiar with the cervical mucus changes during a menstrual cycle. This mucus changes its appearance and texture at different times during the cycle. Mucus assists the sperm to travel and also influences their life span.

Another change is body temperature. A woman's body temperature varies during the cycle. After ovulation the temperature rises and remains at a slightly higher level until menstruation. This rise in temperature can confirm that ovulation has occurred.

Fertility awareness involves recognising these changes and recording them on a chart. This chart is then used to predict when you are fertile.

### When can I use fertility awareness methods?

This approach relies mainly on the changes within your current cycle. Regular periods make these changes more predictable.

At times when your menstrual cycle is irregular it can be more difficult to predict your fertility. These times include at puberty, after childbirth, when breastfeeding, during the peri-menopause and after stopping hormonal contraception.

If you wish to have a baby, fertility awareness methods will also provide you with the personal fertility information you need to maximise your chances of conception.

### How effective are these methods?

These methods require motivation, experience, commitment and cooperation by both partners to be effective for contraception or conception.

International studies have found that the effectiveness of these methods as contraception vary significantly. They are less effective than the hormonal methods (e.g. the Pill or implants).

It is important to be taught how to use these methods by a trained professional.

### Lactational Amenorrhoea Method (LAM)

LAM is a fertility awareness method that is very effective. A woman is very likely to be infertile in the first 6 months after childbirth if the baby is fully breastfed and the woman has had no periods.

## Advantages

- You understand your menstrual cycle better.
- If you wish to have a baby, you are aware of when you are most fertile which can maximise your chance of conception.
- There are no physical side effects because there are no medications or devices.
- These methods can be used where other contraception is not desired on personal grounds.

## Disadvantages

- Requires motivation, experience, commitment and cooperation by both partners.
- Requires daily action in recognising the changes associated with the fertile phase of the cycle.
- Requires abstinence from sex if fertility awareness is the only contraception used.
- It takes time to learn the techniques.
- There are many other factors that can influence the interpretation of the various changes associated with fertility (e.g. stress, illness, medications, alcohol, sleeping habits). Lack of control or understanding of these influences can make these methods less reliable.

## Further information

Australian Council of Natural Family Planning  
[www.acnfp.com.au](http://www.acnfp.com.au)

**Fertility awareness methods do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or blood-borne viruses (BBVs). Practise safer sex. Condoms reduce the risk of STIs and BBVs.**

CONTACT  
SHINE SA

**SHINE**SA

© SHINE SA. Last updated May 2011

SHINE SA fact sheets are regularly reviewed and updated. To download the most recent version visit [www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)

### Clinic & Counselling Appointments and General Enquiries

Tel 1300 794 584

Clinic locations and times are available at [www.shinesa.org.au](http://www.shinesa.org.au)

### Sexual Healthline

Tel 1300 883 793 **Country callers (toll free)** 1800 188 171

Talk to a sexual health nurse about any sexual health issue.

Available 9am – 12.30pm, Monday – Friday

### National Relay Service

[www.relayservice.gov.au](http://www.relayservice.gov.au)

133 677 (TTY/Voice) 1300 555 727 (Speak & Listen) 0423 677 767 (SMS Relay)