



Sympto-Thermal Method

What is the Sympto-Thermal Method?

The Sympto-Thermal Method (STM) is a natural and healthy fertility awareness based method (FABM) of family planning that makes use of a woman's observations of her cervical fluid, basal body temperature (waking temperature) and other biological signs (e.g., changes in the cervix) in order to identify the fertile and infertile times of her cycle. Couples can use the method to either achieve or avoid pregnancy. The STM can be used throughout the couple's reproductive years.

"Sympto" stands for the symptom of cervical fluid, which changes under the influence of the woman's reproductive hormone, estrogen. "Thermal" stands for the basal body temperature (BBT), which rises after a woman ovulates (when the ovary releases an egg). Research shows that both are reliable signs of fertility. The STM teaches couples to cross-check the two primary signs to confirm their time of fertility, when a couple will most likely become pregnant if they have sexual relations.

How does the Sympto-Thermal Method work?

With STM, women learn to observe cervical fluid secretions and record the characteristics of their secretions on a daily basis. Cervical fluid is produced in the woman's cervix, which is located internally at the opening to her uterus or womb. After menstruation, if a woman does not feel or see cervical fluid in the vaginal area, she is probably *not* fertile. The onset of cervical fluid marks the start of the fertile period and the fluid becomes clear, stretchy and slippery as ovulation approaches. After ovulation the fluid dries, indicating the end of a woman's fertile period.

Basal body temperature is your temperature when you first wake from sleep. BBT is lower in the first part of the cycle, and rises right after ovulation under the influence of the woman's reproductive hormone, progesterone. It stays high for the rest of the cycle. Therefore, if a woman tracks her temperature each day, she can identify when ovulation occurred and when the fertile period of her cycle has ended.

STM education teaches couples to chart these signs on a daily basis. Based on the rules that they learn, couples use the chart to identify the days of fertility and infertility and then decide whether to have or avoid sexual relations depending on their family planning goals. The multiple signs of fertility are used together to help couples confidently determine if they are fertile, infertile or possibly fertile on any given day in the cycle.

How effective is the Sympto-Thermal Method in helping couples avoid pregnancy?

If a couple uses the Sympto-Thermal Method perfectly, it is 99.4-99.6% effective in avoiding pregnancy (98-99% effective with typical use). That is, with typical use of the method over one year, less than 2 pregnancies occur per 100 women.^{1,2} This is as good as long acting hormonal contraceptives (IUDs, Depo-Provera injections) and better than the pill or condoms.³ To use STM correctly, couples need to learn from trained instructors and be sure to follow all of the simple instructions.

Can the Sympto-Thermal Method help couples achieve pregnancy?

Yes!

STM is also effective in helping couples achieve pregnancy. By helping couples identify when they are fertile, they can plan to have sexual relations during that period and are likely to achieve pregnancy more quickly. One study of 342



couples found that 81% using STM to become pregnant did so in six months.⁴ Without STM, it takes about twelve months for 85% of couples to become pregnant—twice as long!

What are some benefits of the Sympto-Thermal Method?

The Sympto-Thermal Method is easy-to-learn and an effective FABM for attempting to achieve or avoid pregnancy. There are no devices or drugs to use that harm the body or a couple's fertility.

STM is safe, healthy ("organic"), and inexpensive. It teaches couples to understand their bodies and their combined fertility. The STM is "reversible"—a couple can change their family planning goals whenever they wish. And, research shows that couples who switch to a natural method of family planning improve their relationships, and feel more respected by their partners and more in control of their fertility.⁵

Can women who have irregular cycles, are coming off birth control, or are breastfeeding use the Sympto-Thermal Method?

Yes!

The Sympto-Thermal Method is designed for every woman and couple. It is a great tool for women in all special reproductive situations.

A woman who uses the STM will be able to understand her unique menstrual cycle. Even if her cycle is different every time, she will be able to understand what is happening in her body. If a challenge occurs, a woman can contact a STM teacher for further instruction.

Where can I find more information on Sympto-Thermal methods?

For classes and instructors:

Couple to Couple League International, <http://ccli.org/learn>
(513) 471-2000 or (800) 745-8252

Northwest Family Services, <http://www.symptopro.org>
(503) 546-6377 or (503) 546-9397 FAX

Sources

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2. Frank Herrmann P., et al. "Natural Family Planning with and without barrier method use in the fertile phase: efficacy in relation to sexual behavior: a German prospective long-term study." *Advances in Contraception* 13 (1997):179-189. (Note: In this paper, effectiveness was calculated when barriers were not used during the fertile period because barrier use is its own method.)
3. Trussell, J. "Contraceptive failure in the United States." *Contraception* 83 (2011): 397-404.
4. Gnath C., Godehardt E., Frank-Herrman P., and Freundl G. "Time to pregnancy: results of the German prospective study and impact on the management of infertility." *Human Reproduction* 18 (2003): 1959-1966.
5. VandeVusse L., Hanson L., Fehring R. J., Newman A., and Fox J. "Couples' Views of the Effects of Natural Family Planning on Marital Dynamics." *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 35 (2003):171-176.