

The Cervical Mucus Pattern of Fertility and Patterns of Infertility

The Billings Ovulation Method is a natural method of fertility regulation which helps you to understand your pre-ovulatory pattern of infertility, the pattern of fertility and the time of ovulation, and post-ovulatory infertility. This Method is reliable and harmless. It monitors reproductive health. No drugs, no devices, and no operations are necessary.

The Cervical Mucus Pattern of Fertility — The Changing Pattern.

At some time between menstruations, a fertile woman notices at the vulva a discharge of mucus which is produced by the cervix.

She becomes aware of the sensation this mucus produces at the vulva as she goes about her normal daily activities. This discharge is not an abnormality. It is an indication of good health and tells the woman that now is the time when an act of intercourse may result in pregnancy. The mucus is essential for the healthy function of sperm. A woman is an individual and will describe her own mucus pattern. In general, the **fertile** pattern of mucus changes from day to day, progressing from a sensation of stickiness to slipperiness, often with visible clear or cloudy strings of mucus, until the vulva is slippery and swollen. The vulva has a heightened sensitivity near the Peak. The last day of this slippery sensation at the vulva is known as Peak. This is the time of maximum fertility. At this time, there may be little or no mucus to be seen.

Ovulation occurs usually on Peak day, but in some cycles, ovulation may be delayed until day 1 or day 2 past Peak. There is only one day of ovulation in a cycle and the ovum lives less than 24 hours.

The Patterns of Infertility

1. The Basic Infertile Pattern (BIP) is an unchanging pattern. It is identified at the vulva as:
 - a. nothing felt or seen - dry,
 - b. a discharge which remains the same in both sensation and appearance.
2. A woman is infertile from the 4th day following the Peak. The egg is gone. (There is no BIP after Peak.)

The Rules of the Billings Ovulation Method

For the Achievement of Pregnancy

Following menstruation, during the BIP, intercourse is confined to alternate evenings (early day rules 1 and 2 — see below) until the change occurs which marks the beginning of the fertile phase. Now intercourse is postponed until the vulva feels slippery. Over the next few days the possibility of pregnancy following intercourse increases until the day of Peak, which is the day of maximal fertility. Therefore, intercourse is resumed when the slippery sensation is well established near Peak. Note the softening of the vulva at this time.

In short cycles, Peak may be identified before the menstrual bleeding is finished. Intercourse should occur at this time for the best chance of conceiving. During the 3 days following Peak, conception is still possible but to a diminished degree.

For the Postponement of Pregnancy

Apply: The Early Day Rules and
Peak Rule

The Early Day Rules

- Rule 1 Avoid intercourse on days of heavy bleeding during menstruation.
Rule 2 Alternate evenings are available for intercourse when these days have been recognized as the Basic Infertile Pattern.
Rule 3 Avoid intercourse on any day of discharge or bleeding which interrupts the Basic Infertile Pattern. Then allow 3 days of Basic Infertile Pattern before intercourse is resumed on the fourth evening of the Basic Infertile Pattern. (Wait and See, 1,2,3")

Early Day Rules continue to be applied until Peak is recognized.

Peak Rule

From the beginning of the 4th day following Peak until the end of the cycle, intercourse is available every day at any time. Peak must be identified before the Peak Rule is applied.

The Ovulation Method can be applied successfully in all circumstances and if these 4 Rules are applied, the couple can expect better than 99% success in avoiding pregnancy. It does not matter whether cycles are regular or irregular. Couples will find it reliable in situations when ovulation is delayed habitually, or during breastfeeding, or when the woman has ceased contraceptive medication, or during times of stress and as she approaches menopause.

The Billings Ovulation Method is incompatible with any barrier methods of contraception, withdrawal or any genital contact. Such practices constitute departure from the authentic Billings Ovulation Method.

Billings Ovulation Method

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Stamp or symbol																
Date																
Description of Discharge: Sensation/ Appearance																
Stamp or symbol																
Date																
Description of Discharge: Sensation/ Appearance																
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Notes:

The Natural Family Planning Association

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Instructions

1. As you go about your normal activities the sensations experienced at the vulva can be identified. It is these sensations as well as visual observations that you will record on your chart, using either stamps or symbols. Do not make internal examinations of the vagina or cervix.
2. If you wish to avoid pregnancy, all genital contact should be avoided for the first two to four weeks of charting if correct information is to be obtained.
3. Start the record **today**. Write the date of beginning the record. Note also any significant date, such as the date of the last menstruation, birth, miscarriage, or last contraceptive medication. Each evening briefly describe the observations made during the day, then use the appropriate stamp or symbol indicated below. Continue charting as one cycle until ovulation is recognized by the Peak symptom. The next cycle begins with menstruation.
4. Start a new line with the menstruation. This is recorded with a red stamp or large dot. Note the sensation at the vulva also. If the cycle is short, mucus may begin during menstruation. This is the reason for **Early Day Rule 1**: avoid intercourse during days of heavy menstrual bleeding.
5. **The Basic Infertile Pattern (BIP): cycles of average length** — less than 35 days (for longer cycles see 14.)
 - (a) When menstruation stops and there is a sensation of dryness and no discharge is noticed, use a green stamp, or the symbol * on your chart. This indicates a BIP of dryness. The Early Day Rules are applied to the BIP.
 - (b) A BIP of Discharge may be identified by the unchanging pattern of the observations made at the vulva. Three cycles should be studied in order to confirm that this pre-ovulatory **pattern** of discharge is the same, cycle after cycle, before the Early Day Rules are applied. The white stamp, or symbol 0 is used for any discharge in the first record. Subsequently this discharge may be clearly identified as a BIP of discharge, and the yellow stamp, or = symbol, is then substituted for the white stamp or 0 symbol.
6. A BIP day may be difficult to recognize if intercourse has occurred on the previous evening because of the presence of seminal fluid. This is the reason for **Early Day Rule 2**: intercourse is available on alternate evenings of the BIP. Use a white stamp, or the 0 symbol for the day following intercourse.
7. Once there is a change from the BIP, record the vulval sensation and a description of any visual observations of the discharge. Record these days with the white stamp, or with the symbol 0. **Abstain from intercourse at the first point of change, and wait and see**: this change may progress to ovulation or revert to the B.I.P without ovulation occurring. This is the reason for **Early Day Rule 3**: Avoid intercourse on any day of discharge or bleeding which interrupts the Basic Infertile Pattern. Then allow 3 days of BIP before intercourse is resumed on the fourth evening of the BIP.
8. If the change progresses to ovulation it is recognizable by the changing and developing pattern of variable length. **Peak is the last day of the slippery sensation at the vulva**. The sensation changes on the first day past Peak, the feeling of wetness and slipperiness is replaced by a sensation of dryness or stickiness and Peak can then be accurately marked with an X.
9. Ovulation occurs in most cycles on Peak day, but in some cycles may be delayed until day 1 or day 2 past Peak. The life of the ovum is less than one day, so fertility for the cycle finishes by the end of the third day past Peak. For the avoidance of conception, **Peak Rule** is applied: from the beginning of the 4th day following Peak until the end of the cycle, intercourse is available every day at any time.
10. On the three counting days following Peak the sensation is now either of dryness or stickiness. Descriptions of the sensation and visual signs continue and are recorded with either green baby stamps, if the vulva is dry, or with yellow baby stamps, if there is some mucus but the slippery sensation is gone. These counting days are recorded in symbols with * if dry, or = if there is some mucus, and the numbers 1 2 3.
11. On the fourth day past Peak, you are infertile. Continue to record the days, using either green or yellow stamps, or symbols * or =. Intercourse is available at any time.
12. The next menstruation will occur 11-16 days after the Peak symptom if it is a fertile cycle. Start a new line when menstruation occurs.
13. It is wise to record on the chart the acts of intercourse before Peak and the first act of intercourse after Peak. Correct application of the Method can then be confirmed.

14. **The Basic Infertile Pattern when ovulation is delayed:**

In some cycles, such as breastfeeding, nearing the menopause, post-pill and during times of stress, there may be an unchanging discharge every day, or a succession of days when the unchanging discharge is present, separated by days when there is no discharge. Two weeks of charting, with abstinence from all genital contact, will reveal a pattern of pre-ovulatory infertility.

- (a) When the **pattern** is one of dryness - it is a Basic Infertile Pattern
- (b) When there is a **pattern** of discharge which remains the same day after day - it is a Basic Infertile Pattern.
- (c) When there is a combined pattern of dry days and days of discharge occurring intermittently, and the **pattern** of discharge is the same whenever it occurs - it is a Basic Infertile Pattern.

15. **The BIP in cervical malfunction**

Sometimes, cervical malfunction occurs due to aging or pathology (e.g. caused by contraceptive drugs). If a continuous pattern of discharge is unchanging or combined with intermittent dryness, it is all classified as a BIP and the Early Day Rules apply. If the cervix recovers, the pattern will change signifying possible fertility. The rule is "Wait and See" (3rd Early Day Rule).

Each cycle has its own pattern. Do not expect it to be like any other cycle. If any questions or difficulties arise, you are encouraged to call a Billings Ovulation Method teacher. When you begin to learn the Method, chart reviews are recommended every two to four weeks.