

# Fertility Awareness



Family Planning provides confidential and non-judgemental sexual and reproductive health and education services. Please contact us for further information.

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## What is Fertility Awareness?

Recognising the signs of fertility in a woman's menstrual cycle.

It can be used to

- understand your own menstrual cycle
- plan a pregnancy
- avoid a pregnancy.

**The information in this pamphlet has been written to help you recognise the signs of your fertility.**

**We strongly recommend that you consult an experienced teacher before using fertility awareness as a method of contraception.**

## How reliable is it for preventing pregnancy?

The method can be 98% effective for couples who can easily recognise the fertile phase and use the method correctly. This means that 2 out of 100 couples will get pregnant each year. However, usually 10 to 20 out of 100 couples will get pregnant each year.

This is because

- couples have not been taught correctly
- couples do not understand how to use the method
- couples have sexual intercourse during the fertile time
- in some women it is difficult to recognise the signs of fertility.

## What you need to learn

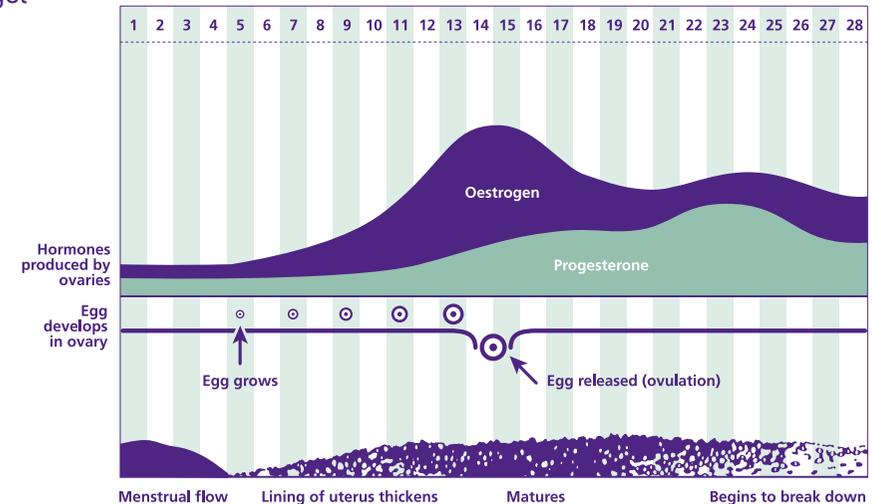
- to understand your menstrual cycle
- how to check your cervical mucus
- how to take your temperature
- how to recognise other signs of your fertile phase
- how to use this information to plan or avoid a pregnancy.

## Understanding your menstrual cycle

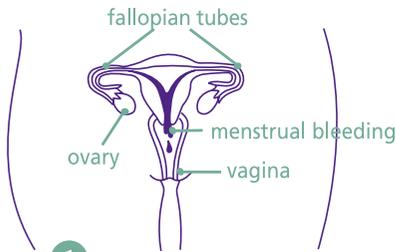
Oestrogen and progesterone are hormones produced by the ovaries. Oestrogen in the first part of the cycle stimulates development of the lining of the uterus.

Before ovulation oestrogen causes glands in the cervix to produce wet, stretchy, fertile mucus.

Progesterone is produced after ovulation. It makes the body temperature rise and prepares the lining of the womb for a fertilised egg.

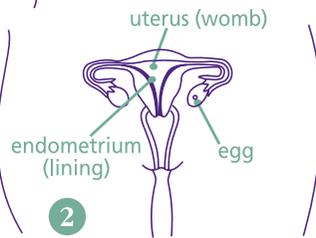


## Stages of the menstrual cycle



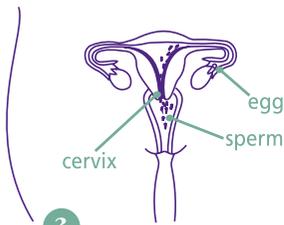
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Day 1 is the first day of the period



2

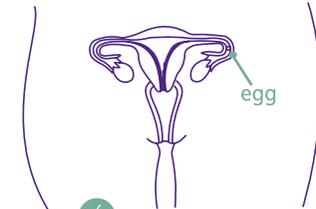
Egg ripens in ovary. Lining of uterus thickens.



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Ovulation. Egg is released from ovary about 14 days before first day of next period.

Egg may be fertilised by sperm if you have sexual intercourse at this time of fertile mucus.



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Egg travels down fallopian tube into uterus. Egg dies within 24 hours unless fertilised.

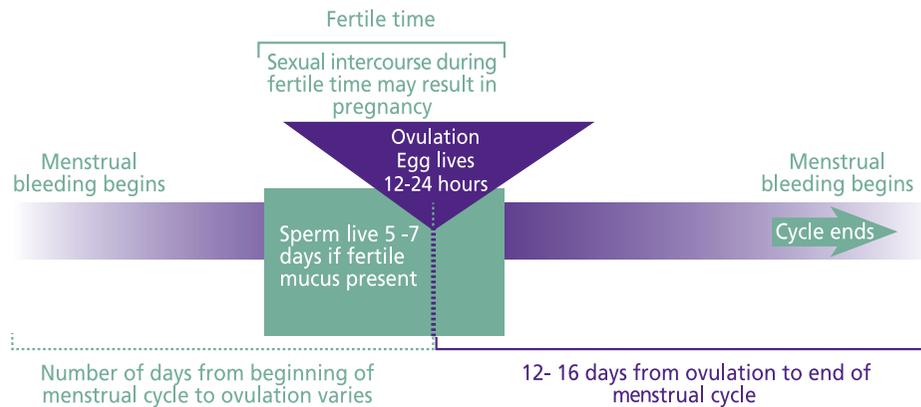
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If egg is not fertilised hormone levels drop. Lining of uterus will begin to break down. Bleeding starts.



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## Fertile time of the menstrual cycle



## Checking your cervical mucus

Mucus produced from the cervix changes throughout the cycle. Fertile mucus is usually clear, wet and stretchy. It may last from half a day to several days just before ovulation.

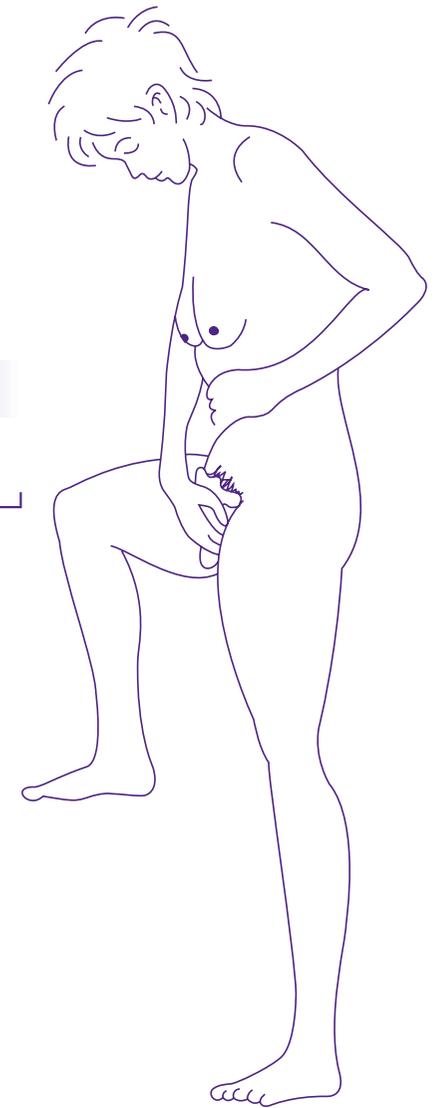
Most women notice the wetness but some women's fertile mucus is not clear or stretchy.

Fertile mucus helps the sperm to pass from the vagina into the uterus and fallopian tubes to meet the egg.

At other times of the cycle there may be no mucus or there may be thick mucus.

No mucus shows that you are not fertile at that time. If there is no fertile mucus, sperm die in the vagina within 6 hours.

If there is any mucus you may be fertile.



To check your cervical mucus, you can wipe the outside of your vaginal opening with a tissue before passing urine.

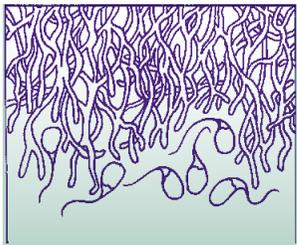
Semen and vaginal lubrication can be confused with cervical mucus.

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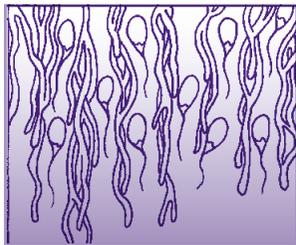
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## Cervical Mucus

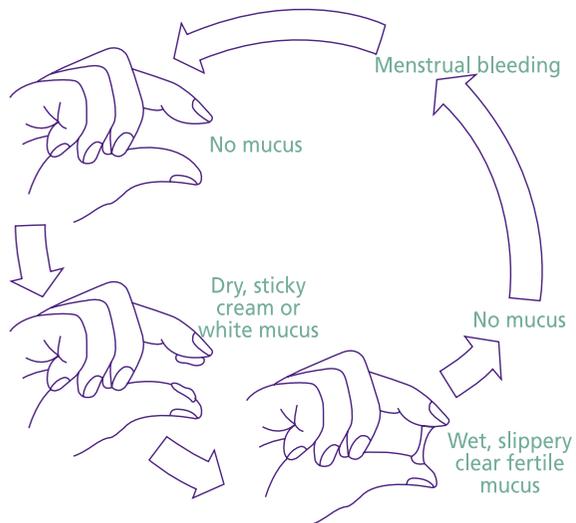
	Non Fertile	Possibly Fertile	Fertile
Is there any mucus on the tissue	No	Yes	Yes
What colour is it?	Nil	Cream or white	Clear
What does it feel like?	Nil	Dry, sticky	Wet, slippery
Does it stretch between your fingers	No	No	Yes



Infertile mucus stops sperm.



Sperm moves through fertile mucus.



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## Taking your temperature

A woman usually ovulates about 14 days before her next period.

After ovulation the temperature rises slightly. This is caused by an increase in the amount of the hormone progesterone which is released after ovulation.

You need to take your temperature as soon as you wake up. Do this before anything else such as having sexual intercourse, going to the toilet, eating, drinking or smoking.



## Recognising other signs of your fertile phase

### PAIN

Some women feel pain in the area of an ovary when they are ovulating. It is not a sure sign of the exact time of ovulation. The pain can be mild or quite sharp and can last for a few minutes, a few hours or 1 to 2 days.

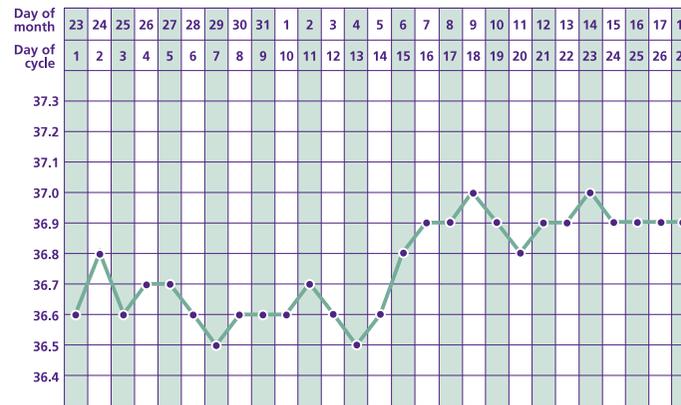
### BLEEDING

Some women notice a little blood in their mucus at their fertile time. It may be reddish, pink or brown.



## Recording your temperature

Start a new chart on the first day of each period. Place a dot in the centre of the square and then join the dots with a line. When your next period begins, start a new chart.



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## Using this information to plan or avoid a pregnancy

### PLANNING A PREGNANCY

The best time to try for a pregnancy is during the fertile phase of a woman's menstrual cycle. A man is constantly producing sperm and so is always fertile. Once sperm have reached the fertile mucus they can survive for 5 to 7 days.

The most reliable sign that a woman is in her fertile phase is when her mucus is wet, clear and stretchy. This is the best time to have sexual intercourse. Because semen can be confused with fertile mucus, having sexual intercourse on alternate days makes it easier to observe the mucus.

### AVOIDING A PREGNANCY

Do not have sexual intercourse during the fertile phase of your cycle unless you use a condom or diaphragm.

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## How do you recognize the beginning of your fertile phase?

### CERVICAL MUCUS

Changes in the cervical mucus signal the beginning of the fertile phase. As soon as you find any mucus you should not have any sexual intercourse. This is because sperm can survive 5 to 7 days in the fertile mucus.

Because it is sometimes difficult to recognise the beginning of the fertile mucus phase, the calculation method is recommended.

### CALCULATION METHOD

Identify the length of your shortest cycle in the last 6 months. Subtract 21 days from the shortest cycle length. For example if your shortest cycle is 27 days, 27 minus 21 equals 6. Even if you have not noticed wetness or a change in your mucus before day 6, you should still think of yourself as fertile from this day.

## How do you recognise the end of your fertile phase?

There are 2 ways

- temperature
- cervical mucus.

### TEMPERATURE

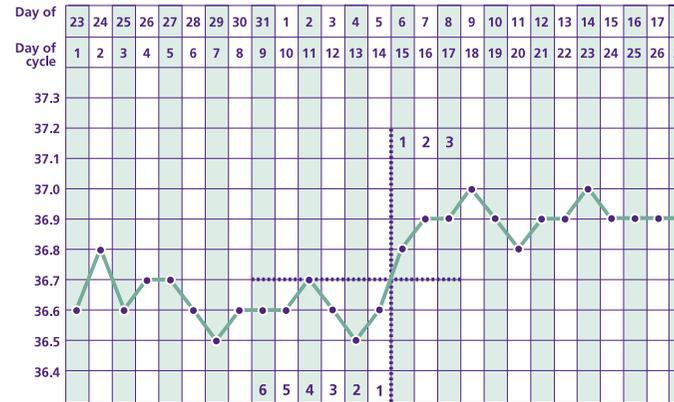
Your temperature goes up the day after ovulation.

To be sure you will not get pregnant do not have sexual intercourse until the evening after your temperature has been up for 3 mornings in a row.

## The three over six rule

You are past the fertile phase if you have 3 temperature recordings higher than the previous 6 days.

The three over six rule helps you to be sure that a rise in temperature is due to ovulation – not an illness.



## CERVICAL MUCUS

The last day of fertile mucus is often called the 'peak' day. This can only be recognised the day after it happens when the fertile mucus changes to thick infertile mucus. The egg is usually released a day after the peak mucus day. You begin the infertile phase on the fourth evening after the peak day. After the egg is released from the ovary it remains fertile for 12 to 24 hours. After this time it is not possible to get pregnant for the rest of that cycle.

**While you are learning this method, it is recommended that you do not have sexual intercourse unless you use a condom or a diaphragm.**

To find an experienced teacher of this method contact Family Planning or Natural Fertility NZ.

**Condoms help protect against sexually transmissible infections.**

**For more information about Family Planning resources, clinics and health promotion services go to our website, [familyplanning.org.nz](http://familyplanning.org.nz)**

