

Myth #8: The Catholic Church wants people to have as many babies as possible.

REALITY: In fact the Church encourages people to be "responsible" stewards over their fertility. In this view of "responsible parenthood" married couples carefully weigh their responsibilities to God, each other, the children they already have, and the world in which they live when making decisions about the number and spacing of children.

Responsible parenthood is lived out within the structures which God has established in human nature. The nature of sexual intercourse, which is both life-giving (pro-creative) and love-giving (unitive), reflects a Divine plan. That is why the Church teaches that couples must not actively intervene to separate their fertility from their bodily union. To do so is to show disrespect for an important gift of the Creator.

Myth #9: Sex is a private decision between two people.

REALITY: Sexual intercourse is not only eminently personal, between a man and a woman, but also has a public and even universal dimension. Human reproduction orients sexual activity to the future of the world. The public consequences of sexual intercourse are illustrated by the miracle of birth, and also through the public devastation wrought by sexually transmitted diseases.

Remember, sexual intercourse radically unites a man and a woman and *is the only human act* which can worthily bring another person into the world!

Myth #10: The Church does not want couples to have sex for pleasure's sake.

REALITY: The Church wants married couples to have the best sex possible! Remember, there is a difference between simply "having sex," which includes actions directed towards the self, and "making love," which requires the giving of self to the other. Only in a lifelong, committed, loving relationship, centered in Christ, can couples hope to fully experience the sacrament of life and love, i.e., marriage.

Current studies confirm what the Church has always taught: married sex is more fulfilling and enjoyable than uncommitted sex. People who "use" sex only for their own pleasure end up using other people--and they lose the real joy of sexuality. Unconditional love is what marriage is all about. That love is a real source of joy in the lives of married couples!

NFP--MYTHS AND REALITY

Myth #1: NFP is just another name for Rhythm.

REALITY: *Natural Family Planning (NFP)* is an umbrella term for modern, healthy, scientifically accurate, and reliable methods of family planning which have been in use for only some 25 years. It differs from "Rhythm" (or the Calendar Method). Rhythm tried to estimate the time of ovulation by calculating previous menstrual cycles. Although this approach had sound scientific underpinnings, in practice it often proved inaccurate because of the unique nature of each woman's menstrual cycle. NFP, by contrast, has been proven scientifically sound in both theory and practice.

NFP is based on scientific research about women's cycles of fertility. Since the 19th century, doctors have known about the changes in cervical mucus and its relation to fertility. In the 1920s, temperature rules were developed. However, it wasn't until the 1950s that an educational process was developed to teach the observation and interpretation of these fertility signs.

The NFP methods are: the *Basal Body Temperature (BBT)* method, which monitors changes in a woman's temperature when she wakes up each morning; the *Ovulation Method (OM)*, which monitors changes in a woman's cervical mucus; and the *Sympto-Thermal Method (STM)*, which combines observations of temperature and cervical mucus with other indicators such as changes in the cervix and secondary fertility signs.

Myth #2: NFP can only be used by women with regular cycles.

REALITY: The natural methods do *not* depend on having regular menstrual cycles; they treat each woman and each cycle as unique. NFP works with menstrual cycles of any length and any degree of irregularity. It can be used during breastfeeding, just before menopause, and in other special circumstances. NFP allows a woman to understand the physical signals her body gives her to tell her when she is most likely to become pregnant. Once she understands this information, she and her spouse can use it according to their family planning intentions.

The natural methods can be used throughout a woman's reproductive life. These methods are progressive. That is, they monitor the current, day-to-day signs of the woman's cycle. Instruction in NFP provides couples with information about their bodies that is specific and observable.

When special circumstances do occur, a woman can contact an NFP instructor for additional guidance in interpreting her signs of fertility.

Myth #3: NFP is too complicated to be useful for most people.

REALITY: Anyone who is taught by a certified teacher and motivated to use NFP can do so. The methods are so simple that they have been successfully adapted to suit the needs of cultures all around the world. According to Kambic and Gray (*Human Reproduction*, 1988), NFP use world wide ranges from 1-3.5% in developing countries. These authors state that "NFP has a role as an important method of family planning in many countries, irrespective of religion, socio-economic development, and overall level of contraceptive use" (p. 693).

Myth #4: NFP is not a reliable method of family planning.

REALITY: When couples understand the methods and are motivated to follow them, NFP is up to 99% successful in spacing or limiting births. The effectiveness of NFP depends upon spouses' following the rules of the method according to their family planning intention (i.e., achieving or limiting pregnancy). Those who are strongly motivated to avoid pregnancy and follow the method-defined rules are very effective in meeting their goal.

Effectiveness of Natural Family Planning in Avoiding Pregnancy

- (Number of pregnancies among 100 couples in one year.)
- Couples who carefully follow all the rules for avoiding pregnancy all the time -- 1-3
- Couples who do not follow all the rules for avoiding pregnancy all the time -- 2-15

Myth #5: Couples who use NFP have less sex than the average American.

REALITY: Most people most of the time are not engaged in sexual activity (see table). If couples who practice NFP were to engage in intercourse on all the days when abstinence is not required for spacing births, they would be doing so at a rate almost twice the national average!

Average monthly coital frequency among both married and unmarried couples in the United States:

| Age: | Average frequency: |
|-------|--------------------|
| 18-24 | 8 |
| 25-34 | 9 |
| 35-44 | 8 |
| 44-55 | 7 |
| 55-67 | 5 |

For more information on NFP in your area:

Omaha Archdiocese:
Family Life Office
(402) 551-9003

Lincoln Diocese:
Family Life Office
(402) 488-2040 xt. 390

Grand Island Diocese:
Chancery
(308) 382-6565

If wishing to avoid pregnancy, a couple practicing NFP is usually advised to abstain from intercourse and genital contact during the wife's fertile time. NFP couples can make love no less frequently in each cycle than other couples.

Myth #6: NFP does not allow for sexual "spontaneity."

REALITY: This depends upon what one means by "spontaneity."

If by sexual spontaneity one means loving gestures, caresses, kisses, loving words, etc., then NFP does not hinder spontaneity. In fact NFP encourages couples to explore ways to express their love to one another because sexual intercourse is not always available. And the spontaneity with which a couple unites in lovemaking each cycle is something NFP couples find to be very special.

If by "spontaneity" one means only being able to engage in sexual intercourse whenever the desire arises, then NFP does not measure up. But then, respect for your spouse--whose desires may not always be exactly the same as yours at any moment--is also in tension with that kind of "spontaneity."

Any limitation on "spontaneity" in NFP should be judged in light of the freedom couples gain by not using chemical or barrier methods of contraception. Remember, chemical contraceptives carry heavy baggage in terms of contraindications and side effects.

Myth #7: There is no difference between NFP and artificial methods of contraception.

REALITY: NFP methods are different from and better than artificial contraception because they

- Cooperate with, rather than suppress, a couple's fertility
- Can be used both to achieve and avoid pregnancy
- Call for shared responsibility and cooperation by husband and wife
- Require spousal communication
- Foster respect for and acceptance of the total person
- Have no harmful side effects
- Are virtually cost free

NFP is unique because it enables its users to work with the body rather than against it. Fertility is viewed as a reality to live, not a problem to be solved.