

Contraception - the Billings method

The Billings Method is a form of natural family planning that teaches a woman to interpret her signs of fertility. It doesn't rely on any drugs or devices, and there are no side effects. A couple can either avoid or achieve a pregnancy once they understand how to identify fertile and infertile times during the woman's menstrual cycle.

This is a cooperative method of family planning that puts the responsibility equally on both partners. Its success depends on the woman learning to understand her own individual pattern of fertility and the couple cooperating with the recommendations of the guidelines.

Safer sex considerations

Apart from complete abstinence, a monogamous (no other partners) relationship – where both partners are free from sexually transmissible infections (STIs) – is the next best protection against STIs. People who are not in a faithful, committed relationship may need to use other methods of contraception. The Billings Method of family planning uses no barriers as protection against STIs.

Fertility facts

Within every menstrual cycle, there is only a small window of opportunity of approximately six days for conception. That's because ovulation (the release of the egg from the ovary) happens on just one day in each cycle. The ovum (egg) lives for between 12 and 24 hours. Fertile mucus is produced by the cervix (neck of the womb) in the days leading up to ovulation. Sperm need this fertile mucus to survive. When it is present, sperm may live for three to five days.

The Billings Method teaches the woman to identify ovulation, as well as the infertile phases in her cycle. Another physical clue to ovulation is a softened, swollen and slippery vulva.

The mucus pattern

If you pay daily attention to the mucus produced throughout your menstrual cycle, you will notice a pattern including:

- In the days following menstruation, you may either feel dry or notice a consistent pattern of discharge (infertile phase).
- Then you observe a change from the infertile phase, either in sensation or the appearance of the mucus. You no longer feel dry (beginning of the fertile phase).
- In the days leading up to ovulation, you will notice a changing pattern of sensation and mucus. The vulva will begin to feel slippery (fertile phase).
- The last day of the slippery sensation is the peak of fertility, ovulation occurs no more than 48 hours after recognising the peak.
- After the 'peak', the vulva feels dry or sticky. The woman is infertile from the fourth day past her peak until the next menstruation.
- Menstruation occurs 11 to 16 days following the recognition of the peak if the cycle is fertile.

Any woman can use the Billings Method

Once learned, the Billings Method can be applied throughout a woman's reproductive life. It can be used with regular and irregular cycles. You can use it:

- To either avoid or achieve a pregnancy
- To identify the return to fertility after childbirth

- As a safe form of family planning during breastfeeding
- To chart your changing cycles leading up to menopause.

Professional instruction

Individual instruction is advisable. There are Billings Method clinics located around Australia that offer detailed training and support.

Where to get help

- Billings Life Leaders In Fertility Education Tel. (03) 9802 2022 or 1800 335 860
- Your doctor
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. (03) 9257 0100
- Family planning clinic

Things to remember

- The Billings Method is a form of natural family planning, which teaches a woman to interpret her signs of fertility.
- The success of this method depends on the couple having accurate information and then cooperating with the guidelines of the Billings Method.
- The Billings Method offers no protection against sexually transmitted diseases.
- It is advisable to get individual instruction from a trained Billings Method teacher.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Billings Life Leaders In Fertility Education

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.