

will extend from the 8th day (26 minus 18) through the 18th day (29 minus 11).

Because very few women have absolutely regular menstrual cycles and most women do not remember their irregularities, the computation of the fertile and infertile days of each cycle should be made from a written record of menstrual cycles preferably extending over at least a year. If the rhythm method is prescribed on the basis of a menstrual record kept for a period shorter than one year, the fertile period should be calculated according to the complete details provided in *The Safe Period* booklet (see page 17). It is not advisable to estimate the fertile period on the basis of the patient's statements concerning her menstrual cycles without a written record, especially if she claims "perfectly regular" cycles.

BBT Method

The use of a basal body temperature (BBT) chart may be useful to the woman who is sufficiently motivated to learn how to take a truly basal temperature (immediately on awakening before any activity whatsoever), and to interpret the chart correctly. A drop in temperature followed by a rise (usually around 0.7°F.) indicates that ovulation has occurred. It is not known whether ovulation takes place just before or at the time of this rise in temperature. The higher level is then maintained for the remainder of the cycle, and sexual relations may safely be resumed on the evening of the third day of sustained higher temperature. One must make sure, however, that the woman understands what her basal body temperature is. Any slight indisposition makes it unreliable to depend upon this method since even a mild upper respiratory illness can cause a slight rise that might be misinterpreted as the post-ovulatory rise.

The temperature record can be used to indicate only the end of sexual abstinence; it cannot be used to determine when the period of abstinence should begin. To calculate when abstinence should start, the woman should refer to her shortest cycle figure minus 18. On that day, when abstinence begins, she should begin also to take her temperature on awakening and carefully record it each day until relations are resumed on the third day of higher temperature.

For those couples who want minimal risk of pregnancy, or for women whose menses are too short or too irregular, total abstinence may be advisable from the beginning of menses until the third day of higher temperature.

The presently available methods of determining the time of ovulation by means of chemical tapes have not proven reliable. While not generally accepted, chloride determination of the cervical mucus has been advocated by some workers for women whose BBT curve is abnormal.

Effectiveness

Correctly taught, correctly understood, and correctly practiced, the effectiveness of the rhythm method may be comparable to that of mechanical and chemical contraceptives, especially if women with grossly irregular menstrual cycles are excluded. However, such successful use implies periods of abstinence longer than most couples find acceptable. Self-taught "rhythm," haphazardly practiced, is one of the most ineffective methods of family planning. According to the World Health Organization, pregnancy rates range from 0.8-1.4 per 100 women-years for women using basal body temperature alone; 3.2-8.0 per 100 women-years for women using basal body temperature plus calendar, and 14-40 per 100 women-years for women using the calendar method only. According to the World Health Organization, biological variation, failure to understand the method, and unwillingness to abstain from coitus all contribute to failures. The lowest pregnancy rates, of course, are obtainable only by intelligent, highly motivated women.

Postcoital Douche

(See p. 16 for related reading.) The postcoital douche is considered to be a poor method of contraception because sperm enter the cervical canal within seconds after ejaculation. Statistical studies have confirmed this low level of effectiveness. The only value of the douche is in an emergency, such as following the breaking or slipping of a condom.