

How effective is NFP in avoiding pregnancy?

Studies that examined the effectiveness of NFP in avoiding pregnancy

Many of the effectiveness studies of the **symptothermal double-check method** (STM) of natural family planning have been done in Europe, the data being collated in Germany by groups in Dusseldorf and Heidelberg. These studies have shown that :

- (a) the symptothermal double-check method **when used correctly** is an effective method of family planning.
- (b) The symptothermal double-check method is **acceptable** and has a low drop-out rate.

The **low drop-out rate** because of dissatisfaction or difficulties with Natural Family Planning, and the **low pregnancy rate** also negate the other long-held belief that **abstinence** is a major obstacle to Natural Family Planning.³

- The **Heidelberg 2007** study by Frank-Hermann et al² **confirms** that the “symptothermal double-check method” of natural family planning that uses **two** indicators of fertility, – basal body temperature and cervical mucus observations to determine the **end** of the fertile time, and cervical mucus plus a calculation to identify the **beginning** of the fertile time, – is an effective and acceptable method of family planning”. In their study² **after 13 cycles** the unintended pregnancy rate for **perfect use**, (i.e. true method effectiveness) was **0.43 per 100 women** (see table vii, and page 9 of this study²), and the **over-all rate** of unintended pregnancy was **1.8 per 100 women**, (Kaplan-Meier method of assessment used).
- The **1989 -1995 European Multicenter study by Prof G. Freundl et al³**, University of Dusseldorf, shows the effectiveness of the ‘symptothermal double-check method’ of natural family planning measured by the Kaplan-Meier method. In this study of 1046 women who contributed 16,865 cycles of exposure, 34 unintended pregnancies occurred. This gives an unintended pregnancy rate of 2.6% at the end of the first 12 cycles of use, and compares favourably with current contraceptive methods, such as IUDs.³ [Most pregnancies occurred because of deliberate intercourse in the fertile phase \('user failure'\).](#) This study by Freundl found that **“users of the ‘double-check’ methods have the lowest rate of unintended pregnancies. This is the most important result since women want to use [the most effective natural method](#)”**.³

The ‘**symptothermal double-check method**’ uses **two** fertility indicators to define the **beginning** of the fertile phase, (cervical mucus observation and some kind of calculation rule), and **two** fertility indicators to define the **end** of the fertile phase, (basal body temperature and mucus observation).

The '**symptothermal single-check method**' uses **one** indicator (cervical mucus observation) to mark the **beginning** of the fertile phase and **one** indicator (basal body temperature) to mark the **end** of the fertile phase.³

1. Freundl G.; Prospective European multi-center study of natural family planning (1989-1992): interim results; Adv. in contraception; 1993, 9; 269-283.
2. P.Frank-Hermann et al; 'The effectiveness of a fertility awareness based method to avoid pregnancy in relation to a couple's sexual behaviour during the fertile time: a prospective longitudinal study; Human Reproduction, pages 5,7; Feb 2007; p1-10. (on internet)
3. Freundl G; 'European multicenter study of natural family planning (1989-1995): efficacy and drop-out'; Advances in contraception; 1999;15; 69-83. This article gives a review of other studies on pages 79,80.

To be most effective, the woman must be taught the Symptothermal Double-Check Method of Natural Family Planning by a qualified natural family planning teacher.