

# How To Measure Effectiveness

**No method of family planning is 100% effective in avoiding pregnancy other than ...**

**No** method of fertility regulation is 100% effective in avoiding pregnancy **other than abstinence, and castration**. Unintended pregnancies occur no matter what method of fertility regulation is used whether natural or artificial.

**NFP** (Natural Family Planning) is the only method of fertility regulation that can be used both to **achieve** pregnancy as well as to **avoid** pregnancy.

One of the couple's main considerations when choosing a particular family planning method is the **effectiveness** of that particular method in **avoiding** pregnancy.

**What methods are used to measure effectiveness in avoiding pregnancy:**

The measure of effectiveness in avoiding pregnancy that is often quoted is the **Pearl Index**. The Pearl Index is **defined** as the number of **unintended pregnancies** per hundred women per year while using the particular NFP Method – that is the number of pregnancies in 1200 observed months of use. (1)

**Effectiveness is classified:**

The **effectiveness** of a family planning method is **classified** under the headings: **(a)** Method Failure and **(b)** User Failure.

## **Method failure**

Method failure is when an unintended pregnancy **occurs** when using the method **correctly**, and in the case of natural family planning when adhering to the **rules** of the NFP Method.

## **User failure**

**User failure** is when an unintended pregnancy **occurs** if the **rules** or instructions for the particular method **have not been strictly adhered to**; e.g. if pills have been missed when using oral contraceptives, or in the case of natural family planning, **not complying** with the **rules of the NFP Method**. The 'user failure' rate in natural family planning depends very much on the couple because this is where factors such as **not adhering** to the **rules**, or **not fully understanding** the method have an influence and it underlines the importance of good teaching by a qualified Natural Family Planning teacher.

Some critics of the Pearl Index suggest that other methods such as Life Table Analysis (i.e. the Kaplan-Meier method), or the Perfect / Imperfect Use Model of Grummer-Strawn, give a more accurate picture of Natural Family Planning effectiveness. (2)

1. Freundl G, 'Prospective European multi-center study of natural family planning (1989-1992): interim results' p277; Advances in contraception; 1993; 9;269-283.
2. Frank-Hermann, Petra, Gnoth, C, Baur S et al 'Determination of the fertile window: Reproductive competence of women- European cycle databases'; Gynecological Endocrinology, p307,308; June 2005, Vol 20, issue 6, p305-312.