

Family Planning Method Resolved by New Concept

By Maribeth Galecki

Making decisions is as much a part of everyday life as breathing. Sometimes, though, it can be hard to find someone to help you make them. I found a solution to that problem — I decided to get married.

Within a week of announcing our engagement, I heard from an army of people, all willing to help me decide everything from the size of the reception to the color of the napkins.

There was one very personal decision, however, that only my fiance and I could make — how to plan our family. If you're thinking about getting married, you're probably facing that same issue. Take it from an expert — the best place to get advice on this is from people who have made that decision already. We'd like to share our experiences with you.

First, a little background. My husband, Steven, and I became engaged in January 1981. After we graduated from Purdue University in May, he came to Rochester to work for Kodak. I followed in September, and took a job as Community Education Coordinator for Natural Family Planning (NFP) Education of Rochester. We were married in South Bend, Ind., on Nov. 28.

Even before Steven and I became engaged, we had talked a great deal about our feelings on life, children and families. We wanted our family planning method to be

compatible with our beliefs and values. We had heard about calendar rhythm, but wanted something more effective.

In our marriage preparation classes, the leader spoke briefly about NFP. It sounded interesting, so we attended an information session when I arrived in Rochester.

We learned that NFP is based on the fact that a man is fertile all the time, because he is continually producing sperm. A woman, on the other hand, is fertile only a few days of each cycle. Her body goes through changes which signal this fertile time — changes in the cervix, cervical mucus, and basal temperature.

The couple learns to observe, record and interpret those changes, and identifies the days when conception is possible. They can then decide to achieve or avoid pregnancy.

The instructors noted that NFP is different from calendar rhythm. Rather than predicting cycle lengths, NFP users observe changes in the current cycle, and know from day to day whether they are fertile. Thus, NFP can be practiced by women with cycles of any length and any degree of irregularity. With proper instruction and motivation, it is more than 99 percent effective.

Steven said, "I really enjoyed the information session. We saw slides on topics such as anatomy, ovulation and fertilization. I've taken health classes before, and I still

learned quite a bit! The session gave me a good background for understanding NFP.

"I was still skeptical about it, though. I wasn't sure how a seven-to-ten-day period of abstinence would affect our marriage, and the signs seemed a little complicated. But the method was safe and natural — and in tune with our values — so we signed up for lessons."

I wondered, too, whether it would work for us. My cycle lengths were all over the map, and the upcoming wedding stresses seemed to be throwing everything off. I didn't know if my body actually went through those changes or if I would be able to notice them.

Two kinds of classes were offered: group, limited to six couples, and private, offered in the instructor-couple's home. Each class consisted of three sessions of instruction. We opted for private lessons, because we wanted to get the first two sessions in before the wedding. At the first session, we learned enough to begin charting that night.

Truthfully, I was amazed — everything happened just as we had learned! All the signs of fertility appeared, even when I had a long cycle, and we were able to detect patterns in them.

"The signs were easy to observe and interpret, with a little practice," Steven noted. "We're becoming more confident in them each day. We have worked out a system where Maribeth observes the

signs and I keep the charts. Checking the signs just takes a few minutes, and it has become routine.

"I like the fact that I have an equal responsibility in our new family planning method. Maribeth and I know exactly where she is in her cycle at all times. We know that intercourse at certain times has the power to create life. When we decide to begin our family, it will be something we both consciously agree to."

Because we are currently postponing pregnancy, we have had to abstain from intercourse during our fertile time. This has been difficult and frustrating occasionally, but not impossible. We're learning new ways to express affection and love.

Above all, NFP makes us communicate. We have to discuss our feelings about sex, when to have children, and other matters. This increased communication seems to carry over into other aspects of our relationship.

"I think periodic abstinence has had positive effects on our marriage," Steven said. "When I can't have intercourse for a while, I appreciate it even more. Our time of abstinence is similar to when we were dating: the first day of the infertile time is like the beginning of our honeymoon."

"I've heard that men especially can't handle abstinence. To me, that's a real put-down; it implies that a man's sexual urges are more powerful than his self-control. Abstinence isn't always easy

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for either of us, but we make that sacrifice for each other."

Steven and I have never been so aware of our bodies and how intricate they are. We are understanding our fertility as a positive gift to be accepted and lived with. I feel as though we are working with, not against, our bodies.

We couldn't list just one reason why we are using NFP. There are many that appeal to us: safe, effective, promotes shared responsibility, morally acceptable.

economical, reversible. We do know, though, that it is a beautiful part of our marriage.

NFP information sessions are held the first Monday of each month at St. Mary's Hospital and the second Friday of each month at Rochester General Hospital. For more information, call or write Natural Family Planning Education of Rochester, 89 Genesee St., Rochester, N.Y. 14611; phone (716) 464-8705.

Hints for Grooms

Who or what decides if the wedding is to be formal, semi-formal or informal?

Those decisions are usually up to the bride, and are often determined by the choice of gown that she wears and the site of the ceremony.

If she wears a long gown with a train, the ceremony is definitely formal. If the bride

elects to wear only a veil with her gown, the ceremony can be considered to be semi-formal.

Who pays for the rental of the formalwear?

The groom and the members of the wedding each pay for his own.



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