

NFP Easing Dilemma Over Family Planning

By Steven and Maribeth Galecki

Making decisions is a common part of everyday life. Sometimes, though, it can be hard to find someone to help you make them. We found a solution to that problem - we decided to get married.

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

There was one very personal decision, however, that only we could make - how to plan our family. If you're thinking about getting married, you're probably facing that same issue. Take it from experts - 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.

Even before we 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. Artificial contraceptives were ruled out because some had serious side effects and others were unappealing. We had heard about the calendar rhythm method, but wanted something more effective.

In our marriage preparation class, the leader spoke briefly about Natural Family Planning (NFP). It sounded

interesting, so we attended an information session sponsored by NFP Education of Rochester.

We learned that NFP is a very safe and effective method of family planning. It is based on the fact that a man is fertile all the time, because he is continually producing sperm, while a woman is fertile only a few days each menstrual cycle. The woman's body goes through changes which signal this fertile time - changes in the cervix, cervical mucus, and basal body temperature.

A couple learns to observe, record, and interpret these changes, and to identify the days when conception is possible. They can then decide to achieve or avoid pregnancy. With proper instruction and motivation, NFP is more than 99 percent effective.

We also discovered that NFP is not the same as the calendar rhythm method. Rhythm involves calculations based on past cycle lengths. NFP, on the other hand, uses observations of changes in the current cycle. NFP users know from day to day whether they are fertile. Thus, the method can be practiced by women with cycles of any length or degree of irregularity.

After the information session, some questions still remained. Would Maribeth's body actually go through those changes? Would we be able to observe and interpret them? How would a seven-to-ten day period of

ASPECTS OF NFP: Abstinence Communication Fertility Awareness Shared Responsibility

abstinence affect our relationship? But because NFP fit all our criteria for a family planning method - safe, effective, in tune with our beliefs - we registered for instruction.

At our first class, we learned enough to begin using NFP right away. We were amazed - everything happened just as we had learned! We could observe the fertility signs no matter how long or short Maribeth's cycles were, and could interpret them reliably. Checking the signs took just a few minutes, and it quickly became part of our daily routine.

Each day that we used NFP, our confidence and experience increased. Our instructors, who also used NFP, were always available when we had questions or concerns. With their guidance, we became satisfied users of NFP.

We have used NFP since our marriage, both to avoid and achieve pregnancy. There are several aspects of NFP that have benefited our relationship. We thought it might be helpful to share our thoughts on them with you.

• Shared Responsibility: Many family planning methods are female-oriented. With NFP, though, we share the responsibilities of its use.

Couples often decide that the woman will observe the fertility signs, and the men will keep the charts, and this is what we have done too.

We know exactly where Maribeth is in her cycle at all times, and we can tell when we are fertile as a couple. Because intercourse at certain times has the power to create life, we decided together to abstain from intercourse during our fertile time when we were avoiding pregnancy.

• Abstinence: During the first year of our marriage, when we were avoiding pregnancy, we abstained from intercourse during the fertile time. This has had many positive effects on our relationship. We have learned new ways to show affection and love for each other. When we can't have intercourse for a while, we appreciate it even more.

We often compare our period of abstinence to the time when we were dating - we go back to the handholding, the long walks, the romantic things we did. When our infertile time returns, it's almost like our honeymoon again.

Some people tell us that they just wouldn't be able to abstain from intercourse. We wondered about that, too, before we began NFP. We have found, though that our self-control is more powerful than our sexual urges. Abstinence isn't always easy, but it's not impossible. We make the sacrifice for each other.



Information Sessions

Pre-registration is required for the NFP information sessions sponsored by Natural Family Planning Education of Rochester. Sessions are free and for further information or to register contact Marian LaPorta, Community Education Coordinator at 464-8705. February sessions are:

- 7:30-9 p.m., Monday, Feb. 6 at St. Mary's Hospital, east auditorium;
- 7:30-9 p.m., Friday, Feb. 10, Rochester General Hospital, main conference room.
- 7:30-9 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 15, St. Charles Borromeo Church, Greece.
- 7:30-9 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 16, St. Margaret Mary School, Irondequoit.
- 7:30-9 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 22, St. Mary's Church, Rochester.
- 7:30-9 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 24, St. Mary's Church, Ontario.

• Communication: NFP encourages us to communicate. We have to discuss our feelings about our sexual relationship, abstinence, when to have children, and other matters. This increased communication seems to carry over into other aspects of our relationship.

• Fertility Awareness: With NFP, we have become more in tune with our bodies and more aware of our powers to create life. We see our fertility as a positive gift to be lived with and accepted, not as something that should be suppressed or destroyed. We feel as though we are working with, not against, our bodies.

There are many reasons why we're using NFP: it's safe, effective, natural,

morally acceptable, inexpensive, and a shared responsibility. It's a beautiful part of our marriage.

Free 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. We recommend that engaged couples take instruction at least four to six months before their wedding, if possible. For more information, contact Natural Family Planning Education of Rochester, 89 Genesee St., Rochester, N. Y. 14611, (716) 464-8705; or NFP of the Southern Tier, 480 Main St., Big Flats, N. Y. 14814, (607) 562-3331.

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