

successors. The Church has steadily taught against contraception since the time of the Apostles, and such consistent teaching over the centuries is the work of the Holy Spirit and is therefore true.

Second, Sacred Scripture makes it clear that God intends that sexual intercourse ought to be exclusively a marriage act. That is, **sexual intercourse is intended by God to be at least implicitly a renewal of the marriage covenant.** That's why adultery and fornication are seriously immoral. For married couples, that means the marriage act ought to be a **true** marriage act, a renewal of the faith, love, and "for better and for worse" commitment of their original marriage covenant.

Contraception, however, contradicts their marriage covenant. It says, "We take each other for better **but** definitely and positively **not** for the imagined worse of possible pregnancy." That's dishonest. It is not a true marriage act.

Authentic Catholic doctrine 1) encourages generosity in having children and 2) teaches the need to practice chaste systematic NFP when there is a sufficiently serious reason to postpone or avoid pregnancy. Both are counter-cultural in the 21st Century. Both involve the cross to a certain degree. And that means that both offer the opportunity to walk with the Lord Jesus.

The most elemental teaching of Jesus is that if we want to be his disciples we need to take up our cross daily. Jesus is the

ultimate Author of Catholic teaching on love, sexuality, and marriage, and his disciples are called and privileged to follow it. The rewards of following this beautiful teaching are high—peace of soul and a lasting, healthy family life.

NFP International is a Catholic apostolate that openly affirms these teachings and provides **high quality** and **low cost** practical help to live them. The NFPI manual, ***Natural Family Planning: The Complete Approach***, is available for purchase and for downloading.

The **NFPI Home Study Course** is available at the NFPI website. The Home Study Course has benefits that last a lifetime, and it gets very high marks from those who have used it.

The **NFPI classroom course** is offered by trained teachers and is available in select locations.

Natural Family Planning International

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Natural Family Planning — The Complete Approach

Natural Family Planning is God's plan for spacing babies, and it comes in two distinct forms—Systematic Natural Family Planning and Ecological Breastfeeding.

1. Systematic Natural Family Planning comes in several forms or "methods." All of them are systems for determining the fertile and infertile times of the female fertility cycle. The "method" of pregnancy avoidance used by every true form of NFP is chaste abstinence during the fertile time.

Systematic natural family planning is based on the scientific method—the systematic observation and recording of recurring events. In this case, the events are the signs of fertility and infertility. Before ovulation, a woman's fertility hormones develop the inner lining of her uterus, and they also cause the cervix to discharge mucus that aids sperm life and migration. After ovulation, a post-ovulation hormone

causes the mucus to disappear and also causes her at-rest body temperature to rise.

The mucus and temperature signs can be used in a cross-checking way to identify the fertile time, and they can also be used separately. When these signs are used in a cross-checking way, the system is called the Sympto-Thermal Method. When used separately the systems are called a Mucus-only or a Temperature-only method. In addition, the cervix has been a very helpful sign for many women and couples.

Are there any practical differences? Comparative studies have shown that cross-checking systems are more effective than mucus-only systems for *avoiding* pregnancy. All cross-checking and mucus-only systems are highly effective in identifying the prime fertile time for *achieving* pregnancy.

2. Ecological Breastfeeding is a form of baby care defined by the Seven Standards of ecological breastfeeding. These are seven maternal behaviors that keep mother and baby together and allow frequent nursing. Scientific studies have shown that mothers who follow the Seven Standards will experience, on the average, 14 to 15 months of breast-feeding amenorrhea (the absence of periods due to breastfeeding). Only seven percent of such mothers experienced less than six months of amenorrhea, and one-third were still without a period at 18 months postpartum.

The frequent nursing of ecological breastfeeding maximizes the great health

benefits of breastfeeding in general. **For babies, there are over 20 distinct benefits** such as reduced incidents of allergies, asthma, diarrhea, diabetes, ear infections, leukemia and lymphoma plus another half-dozen general benefits such as a better immune system and a better response to vaccinations. Because a newborn's brain continues to develop for 12 months, school-age children who were breastfed for at least a year score higher on cognitive and IQ tests.

For mothers, there are at least eight distinct health advantages from breastfeeding including reduced risks of anemia, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and osteoporosis. Yes, research has shown that even many years after breastfeeding, such mothers have reduced risks of hip fractures.

Parents who experience ecological breastfeeding come to appreciate in a very personal way that God truly does have a natural plan that provides the best nutrition for babies, lasting health benefits for both mother and baby, and a natural delay in the return of fertility. It also does not require abstinence.

For many couples, ecological breastfeeding is a wonderful and greatly appreciated form of natural baby spacing. When fertility returns, they have to discern whether God is calling them to have another baby at that time. If they come to believe that they have a sufficiently serious reason to postpone pregnancy, then they can practice the other form of

God's plan for married couples who need additional spacing—systematic NFP.

Freedom of choice. Couples deserve to know about all the common signs of fertility so they can make a well informed choice. That's the conviction of NFP International, so it teaches the inclusive Sympto-Thermal Method of systematic NFP and Ecological Breastfeeding.

The Moral Issues. Everyone today is aware that there are several unnatural forms of birth control. Barrier methods are contraceptive because they seek to prevent the sperm and ovum from meeting. Hormonal birth control is a form of contraception when it prevents ovulation and/or prevents sperm migration.

But it can also reduce the inner lining of the uterus so much that, when breakthrough ovulation occurs, the uterus rejects the implantation of the newly conceived baby. That's the "chemical abortion" potential of the Pill (and similarly with implants and the IUD). The Pill also increases significantly a woman's risk of breast cancer. The epidemic of breast cancer didn't "just happen."

The Catholic Church teaches that using unnatural forms of birth control is the grave matter of mortal sin. But why?

First, the Church believes that Jesus keeps his promises. At the Last Supper, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would continue to guide the Apostles and their