

Own Your Cycle

A Practical Guide to Natural Birth Control



www.embracingthejourney.ca

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Welcome | 03 |
| Chapter I: Introduction to Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM) | 04 |
| Chapter II: How to Get Started with FABM | 07 |
| Chapter III: Applying the Information to Avoid Pregnancy | 10 |
| Chapter IV: Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them | 11 |
| Chapter V: Final Thoughts | 14 |

WELCOME

Hello, I'm your Full Spectrum Doula Kat Thompson.

I'm so glad you've chosen this guide to take control of your fertility and gain a deeper understanding of your body.

Whether you're just starting to explore natural birth control methods or have been tracking your cycle for a while, this freebie is designed to equip you with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to avoid pregnancy using Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM).

My goal is to help you reconnect with your body, recognize your fertility signs, and feel empowered to make informed decisions that align with your goals. This journey is about more than tracking symptoms—it's about understanding your unique cycle, gaining confidence in your choices, and feeling in control of your reproductive health.

I hope you'll have a clearer understanding of your fertility, a set of practical strategies for avoiding pregnancy, and a renewed sense of empowerment to guide your journey forward.



As a Full Spectrum Doula & Wellness Provider, I'm here to support you with compassion, evidence-based guidance, and practical advice tailored to your needs. My hope is that this guide inspires confidence in your decisions, clarity in a sea of information, and peace of mind as you prepare for this exciting new chapter.

Let's navigate this journey together—one myth, one truth, and one empowering moment at a time.

You've got this, and I'm here to help.

Warmly,

- Kat Thompson



CHAPTER I

Introduction to Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM)

What is FABM?

Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM) are a group of natural family planning techniques that help individuals track their fertility signs in order to make informed decisions about avoiding pregnancy or conceiving. FABM involves understanding and monitoring your body's natural rhythms, particularly your menstrual cycle, to identify when you are fertile and when you are not.

Instead of relying on synthetic hormones or medical interventions, FABM empowers you to use the knowledge of your own cycle to take control of your reproductive health. By observing signs such as cervical mucus, basal body temperature (BBT), and cervical position, you can accurately determine your fertile and infertile windows, and adjust your actions accordingly.

Why Choose Natural Birth Control?

FABM offers several advantages over other forms of contraception:

- **No Hormonal Side Effects:** Unlike hormonal birth control methods that can have unwanted side effects (such as mood changes, weight gain, or headaches), FABM allows you to avoid these by relying solely on natural signs.
- **Increased Awareness of Your Body:** By tracking your fertility signs, you become more attuned to your body's rhythms, which can help you better understand your overall health and reproductive function.
- **Personalized and Empowering:** FABM is highly individualized. You learn to track your cycle and use methods that suit your body's unique patterns. It's an empowering way to manage your fertility without relying on external interventions.
- **Environmentally Friendly:** As a natural method, FABM has no environmental impact compared to the production, packaging, and disposal associated with synthetic hormonal contraception.

CHAPTER I

Introduction to Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM) cont.

How Does FABM Work?

FABM is based on tracking several fertility signs that change throughout your menstrual cycle. The primary signs to monitor include:

- **Basal Body Temperature (BBT):** Your body's temperature slightly increases after ovulation, which can be tracked with a basal thermometer. By recording your temperature every morning before getting out of bed, you can identify when ovulation has occurred.
- **Cervical Mucus:** The consistency and appearance of cervical mucus changes throughout your cycle. Around ovulation, it becomes clear, slippery, and stretchy, similar to egg whites. This indicates fertility, while other times in your cycle, the mucus is thicker and less fertile.
- **Cervical Position:** The position and firmness of your cervix also changes throughout the cycle. During ovulation, the cervix is typically softer, higher, and more open to allow sperm to enter the uterus.

Tracking These Signs

To use FABM effectively, you need to consistently track your fertility signs every day. Many people use a combination of methods to create a comprehensive picture of their fertility, such as tracking temperature alongside cervical mucus observations. This helps identify the fertile window, which is the period when pregnancy is most likely.

The Fertile Window

Your fertile window occurs just before and during ovulation. This is the best time for sperm to fertilize an egg. The egg survives for about 12-24 hours after ovulation, but sperm can live for up to five days in the female reproductive tract. Therefore, timing intercourse around the fertile window is key for both preventing and achieving pregnancy.

CHAPTER I

Introduction to Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM) cont.

Why Is FABM an Effective Birth Control Option?

When used correctly, FABM is highly effective. Research shows that with perfect use, FABM can be 99% effective in avoiding pregnancy, which is similar to other birth control methods like the IUD or birth control pills.

However, with typical use, which accounts for human error, the effectiveness rate is around 76-88%.

The success of FABM depends on your commitment to tracking your signs accurately, and the consistency with which you follow the method.

Getting Started with FABM

Starting with FABM can feel overwhelming at first, but with patience and consistency, it becomes easier. There are many tools and resources available to help you track your cycle, including mobile apps and charting methods.

The key is to be mindful of your body's natural signals and to consistently track your fertility signs.

Remember, this process is about more than just avoiding pregnancy—it's about connecting with your body and gaining a deeper understanding of your own fertility.

As you move forward, you'll be empowered to make decisions that align with your health and your personal goals.

CHAPTER II

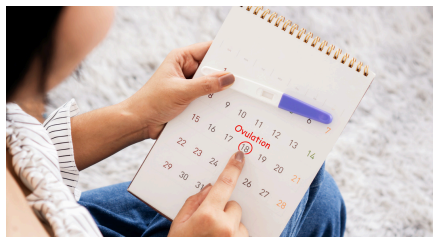
How to Get Started with FABM

Getting started with Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM) may feel like a big step, but with the right tools and a little patience, it can be a straightforward and empowering journey. Whether your goal is to avoid pregnancy or gain a deeper understanding of your cycle, learning how to track your fertility signs is the first step.

Start Tracking Your Cycle

To use FABM effectively, you'll need to track your cycle every day. Your cycle is counted from the first day of your period to the first day of your next period. Here's what to track:

- **Day 1:** Mark the first day of your period as Day 1 of your cycle. Your period typically lasts from 3 to 7 days, during which your cervix is usually closed, and you're considered infertile.
- **Cycle Length:** Track the length of your cycle each month to identify any patterns or irregularities. Most cycles last between 26 and 32 days, but cycles outside this range are also common. Consistent tracking will help you identify your unique fertility pattern.



Track for a Minimum of Three Months

To gain a clear understanding of your cycle and identify any patterns, it's crucial to track for **at least three months**. This will give you enough data to recognize your cycle's typical length and understand any variations.

Tracking for several months ensures that you're not relying on a single cycle, which may be irregular due to stress, illness, or other factors. Once you've tracked for a few months, you'll be able to spot trends and understand your natural fertility rhythm more accurately, which is essential for effectively using FABM to either avoid pregnancy or track ovulation for conception.

CHAPTER II

How to Get Started with FABM cont.

Learn to Track Your Fertility Signs

There are three primary fertility signs to monitor each day: Basal Body Temperature (BBT), Cervical Mucus, and Cervical Position. These signs help you identify when you are most fertile.

Basal Body Temperature (BBT)

- **What is it?**
 - Your basal body temperature is your body's temperature at rest, taken immediately upon waking before you get out of bed. After ovulation, your temperature rises slightly and stays elevated until your next period.
- **How to track it?**
 - Use a basal thermometer to take your temperature each morning at the same time before getting out of bed.
 - Record your temperature on a chart or in an app. You'll notice a slight dip right before ovulation, followed by a rise (typically around 0.5°F or 0.3°C) after ovulation occurs.

- Charting BBT will allow you to confirm when ovulation has taken place, though it won't predict ovulation beforehand.

Cervical Mucus

- **What is it?**
 - Cervical mucus changes in consistency and texture throughout your cycle, indicating your fertility. Around ovulation, mucus becomes clear, slippery, and stretchy, similar to egg whites. This is your most fertile time.
- **How to track it?**
 - Check your cervical mucus by wiping with toilet paper or inserting a clean finger into your vagina each day.
 - Record the appearance and texture of your mucus (e.g., dry, sticky, creamy, or stretchy) to identify your fertile window.
 - Track your mucus alongside your BBT for a more comprehensive understanding of your cycle.

CHAPTER II

How to Get Started with FABM cont.

Cervical Position

- **What is it?**

- The cervix changes position and texture during the menstrual cycle. Around ovulation, it becomes softer, higher, and more open to allow sperm to pass through.

- **How to track it?**

- With clean hands, gently feel your cervix each day to note its position and texture.
- Keep track of changes in position—when it is low, hard, and closed, you are in your infertile phase; when it is soft, high, and open, you are in your fertile window.

- **Fertile Days:** The days when cervical mucus is most fertile (clear, slippery, and stretchy) and when your cervix is soft, open, and high.
- **Ovulation Day:** The day your body releases an egg, which is the most fertile day of your cycle.
- **Post-Ovulation:** After ovulation, your fertility begins to decline. Your BBT will rise, and cervical mucus will change to a more dry or sticky consistency.

Understand Your Fertile Window

Once you've begun tracking your fertility signs for a couple of cycles, you'll start to notice patterns that indicate your fertile window (the days when pregnancy is possible). This window typically includes the five days leading up to ovulation and the day of ovulation itself.

CHAPTER III

Applying the Information to Avoid Pregnancy

To avoid pregnancy using FABM, you'll need to identify the fertile window and avoid unprotected intercourse during this time. You can do this by:

- **Abstinence or Barrier Methods:** During the fertile window, abstain from intercourse or use barrier methods like condoms or spermicide to prevent pregnancy.
- **Tracking Each Cycle:** Continue tracking your cycle every month and using your observed fertility signs to identify your fertile window. It may take a few months to get into the rhythm of tracking and recognizing your patterns.

Practice Consistency and Patience

FABM requires consistency and patience. Don't be discouraged if it takes a few cycles to get comfortable with tracking. Over time, you'll gain confidence in recognizing your body's signs and will be able to predict your fertile and infertile days more accurately.

Additionally, using a cycle tracking app (such as PreMom, Glow, etc.) can help you organize your data and make sense of your patterns. These tools often include features for tracking BBT, cervical mucus, and other fertility signs.



Seek Support When Needed

While FABM is highly effective, it requires consistent effort. If you feel overwhelmed, consider reaching out for support. Whether you're struggling to track or need advice on interpreting your signs, I'm here to help guide you through this process.

Getting started with FABM can be life-changing and empowering. By tracking your fertility signs, you can better understand your cycle, make informed decisions, and take control of your reproductive health. As you move forward, remember that this process is a journey. Take it one day at a time, and trust that the knowledge you gain will empower you to make the best decisions for your body and life.

CHAPTER IV

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them

Starting your journey with Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM) can be empowering, but it's not without its challenges.

It's completely normal to encounter some bumps along the way as you learn to track and interpret your fertility signs. The good news is that these challenges can often be managed with a little patience and consistency.

Here are some of the most common obstacles people face when using FABM, and tips for overcoming them:

Irregular Cycles

One of the most common challenges when using FABM is having irregular cycles. Irregular cycles can make it harder to predict your fertile window, and it can take longer to identify patterns.

How to Overcome It:

- **Track Consistently:** Even with irregular cycles, consistent tracking of your BBT, cervical mucus, and cervical position will help you identify patterns over time.

- **Use Apps:** Consider using a fertility tracking app to log your signs, which will help you spot trends even in irregular cycles.
- **Give It Time:** It may take several cycles to recognize your unique pattern. Don't be discouraged if things feel uncertain at first.
- **Seek Support:** If you continue to struggle, it might be helpful to consult with a trained Fertility Doula who can assist with cycle interpretation and provide personalized advice.

Stress and Emotional Factors

Stress, lifestyle changes, and emotional factors can affect your cycle and make tracking fertility signs more challenging. High levels of stress, for example, can delay ovulation or even cause anovulation (when you don't ovulate at all).

How to Overcome It:

- **Prioritize Stress Management:** Incorporate stress-reducing activities like yoga, meditation, or deep breathing exercises into your daily routine. This can help keep your cycle more regular and improve your overall well-being.

CHAPTER IV

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them cont.

Stress and Emotional Factors cont.

- **Be Patient with Your Body:** Emotional ups and downs are normal, and cycles can fluctuate due to stress or major life changes. Give yourself grace and don't expect perfection.
- **Create a Routine:** Establishing a consistent routine for taking your BBT and tracking your fertility signs every day can help reduce stress around tracking. Knowing that you are taking control can also provide peace of mind.

Difficulty in Identifying Fertile Signs

Some people find it difficult to recognize or interpret their cervical mucus or other fertility signs. This is especially common in the early stages of using FABM, as the changes in cervical mucus can sometimes be subtle.

How to Overcome It:

- **Track Daily:** Track your fertility signs every day and be patient—consistency is key. Over time, you'll become more familiar with your body's natural rhythms.
- **Get to Know Your Cycle:** It may take a few cycles to really get to know the texture and changes in your cervical mucus. Don't get discouraged if it takes a few months to get a clear picture.
- **Use Multiple Signs:** While cervical mucus is one of the most significant fertility signs, it's not the only one. By tracking BBT and cervical position as well, you'll get a clearer and more complete picture of your fertility window.
- **Educate Yourself:** Read books, attend workshops, or use apps dedicated to fertility awareness to deepen your understanding of these signs.

Lack of Support or Guidance

Fertility awareness can sometimes feel like a solo journey, and lack of support can lead to confusion or self-doubt, especially if you're unsure how to interpret your cycle data.

How to Overcome It:

- **Find a Support System:** Seek out online forums, Facebook groups, or communities where others are also tracking their fertility signs. Sharing experiences and advice with others can help you feel more supported.
- **Work with a Doula or Coach:** A Fertility Doula can provide personalized support, guidance, and interpretation, helping you feel more confident in your decisions and tracking.
- **Join a Class:** Consider taking a class or webinar on Fertility Awareness to deepen your understanding and connect with like-minded individuals.

CHAPTER IV

Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them cont.

Uncertainty About Effectiveness

FABM can be very effective when used correctly, but it requires commitment and consistency. If you're used to relying on other forms of contraception, it's natural to feel uncertain about whether FABM will work for you.

How to Overcome It:

- **Understand the Method:** The key to successful FABM use is understanding your signs and using them correctly. Take time to learn the method thoroughly and seek clarification if needed.
- **Start Slow:** If you're new to FABM, start by using it alongside a backup method like condoms until you feel more confident. This will help ease any anxiety about effectiveness.
- **Trust the Process:** With consistent tracking and a clear understanding of your fertility signs, FABM can be as effective as other forms of contraception. The more you track and learn, the more confident you'll become in its effectiveness.

How to Overcome It:

- **Stay Flexible:** Understand that life is unpredictable, and sometimes your body will be too. If you experience a cycle shift due to stress or travel, don't be discouraged. Keep tracking and let the data speak for itself.
- **Adjust Expectations:** Know that your cycle might fluctuate, and that's okay. It's a sign that your body is adjusting, not that you're failing at tracking. Keep going and be patient with yourself.

Unexpected Life Changes or Cycles

Life events, such as travel, illness, or significant lifestyle changes, can throw off your cycle and make tracking your fertility signs a bit more challenging.

CHAPTER V

Final Thoughts

No matter where you are on your journey with Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM), remember that challenges are part of the process—and they're completely normal. Every person's cycle is unique, and with time, practice, and consistency, you will become more familiar with your body's natural rhythms. As you continue to track and understand your fertility signs, you'll gain the confidence to make informed decisions about your reproductive health and avoid pregnancy naturally.

Along with my training and education in fertility, I'm here to support you in every way possible. Whether you need guidance on nutrition, supplements, or minerals to support your fertility journey, or you just need someone to talk to about the hard or sensitive topics, I'm always available to help.

Please know that you don't have to navigate this alone – whether it's tackling the day-to-day challenges of tracking your cycle, addressing concerns around irregular cycles or emotional well-being, or finding personalized solutions, I'm here for you every step of the way. Your journey to natural birth control and understanding your fertility is a powerful one, and I'm honoured to be part of it.



Take it one step at a time, trust the process, and always reach out when you need assistance. I'm here to support you through the ups and downs of this journey with guidance and care, so you can feel in control of your fertility and your health.

- Kat Thompson