

Fertility Awareness Methods: A True Method of Family Planning

Fertility Awareness Based Methods (FABMs) are one option among many to help a couple prevent pregnancy. However, FABMs are about more than preventing pregnancy, they are a truly authentic form of family planning. FABMs can be used to postpone or achieve pregnancy as well, to monitor health, and to help a couple achieve their family planning goals. Modern FABMs require that women learn how to chart their cycle, and this requires an investment of time in the beginning. The knowledge gained from charting the female cycle can be incredibly empowering and inform women about what's happening with their bodies, truly serving as a fifth vital sign.

With modern FABMs, women observe one or more signs of the female cycle to identify when she may be fertile and when she is not. When a woman can identify her fertile window using FABMs, couples can modify their behavior based on their family planning goals. FABMs have no medical side effects or adverse effects on the environment, and they are cost-effective. They are also effective at preventing pregnancy:

- Cervical fluid only: 90–96%
- Cervical fluid and temperature: up to 98%
- Cervical fluid and urinary hormones: 86–94%

Other Methods of Preventing Pregnancy

Barrier Methods: condoms, diaphragms, cervical caps

- Side effects: local sensitivity reactions
- Effectiveness: 75–85% effective (depending on type of barrier method)
- How they work: blocking sperm from reaching the egg.

Oral Contraceptive Pills: combined synthetic estrogen and progestin or progestin only

- Side effects: increased depression and suicidality risk, risk of blood clots especially to the lungs and heart, acne, stomach issues, migraines, increased risk of breast, cervical, and liver cancers.
- Effectiveness: 90–92%
- How they work: oral contraceptive pills have three mechanisms of action
First, hormones in the pill can suppress normal ovulation.
Second, these methods can thicken cervical mucus, preventing sperm penetration.
Third, the synthetic hormones thin the uterine lining which prevents the implantation of a fertilized egg.

Long-Acting Reversible Contraception (LARCs): implants and IUDs

- Side effects: increased risk of pelvic inflammatory disease, uterine perforation, and abnormal uterine bleeding
Note: a woman must see her doctor or medical professional to have an implant or IUD removed, taking control away from the woman.
- Effectiveness: up to 98–99% effective
- How they work: the synthetic hormone progestin stops ovulation, and if ovulation does occur, it prevents the implantation of the fertilized egg.

Depo-Provera Injection

- Side effects: increased risk of breast cancer, depression, weight gain, abnormalities in uterine bleeding, reduction in bone mass density, reduced libido
- Effectiveness: 94%
- How it works: injectable medication women receive every 3 months with synthetic progestins which stops ovulation
- Note: Hormonal contraceptives can have an embryocidal effect. While hormonal contraceptives suppress ovarian activity, breakthrough ovulation still happens with some frequency, especially with the mini-pill. Ovulation can still happen, and therefore conception can still happen. The secondary mechanism of hormonal contraception that thins the endometrium makes it so that the embryo fails to implant and therefore dies.

Choosing a Family Planning Method

There are many factors that inform your family planning decision! Factors you might want to consider include effectiveness, side effects, ease of use, effect on libido, and cost. If you are considering FABMs, you might also want to consider how involved you want your partner to be, which signs you want to track, and how much time you are willing to put into learning the method. When deciding which method of family planning is best for you, talk to your doctor and your partner about your options. Remember that you are the heroine of your own health journey and deserve access to reliable information to make a truly informed choice!

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Restorative Reproductive Medicine *Defined*

Restorative Reproductive Medicine (RRM): According to the International Institute for Restorative Reproductive Medicine (IIRRM), RRM is any scientific approach to reproductive medicine that seeks to **cooperate with** or **restore** the **normal physiology and anatomy of the human reproductive system**. It does not employ methods that are inherently suppressive, circumventive or destructive. This approach **respects the bodily integrity of the human person** and the right of women and men to have access to reproductive health care that **respects their right to understand and cooperatively manage their own fertility**, with appropriate medical assistance.

Restorative Reproductive Health: Sometimes RRM is only thought of in terms of pathologies, but according to the IIRRM, it also supports and promotes Restorative Reproductive Health which includes **empowering women and men to know and understand their bodies** and **appreciate the importance of natural reproductive health to overall health and well-being**, often through the use of **body literacy** programs that incorporate **science based charting methods** and teacher lead reproductive health education.

Body Literacy: Just as literacy is the ability to decode the signs and symbols of a language into meaningful communication, so then **Body Literacy is the ability to understand and interpret the signs our cyclic female bodies give us each day**. Women can learn to “read” their bodies. Specifically, Body Literacy teaches the four phases of the menstrual cycle, female biomarkers and what they signify, recognizing ovulation as the main event of the cycle, and an understanding that hormonal health affects overall health. It is only in understanding how our bodies exist in a state of health that we can exercise a truly informed consent over our lifestyle and medical decisions.

Cycle Charting: Cycle Charting is a record, either written or digital, of specific observations a woman keeps about her body each day. Cycle Charts primarily may include data on the Cycle Day, Cervical Fluid (sensation and observations), Basal Body Temperature, and/or Urinary Hormones. Simply put, Cycle Charting is a woman becoming literate of her own body, empowering her to better understand her health. Cycle Charts can be used as effective diagnostic tools to identify underlying hormonal imbalance, as well as tools for both achieving and avoiding pregnancy.



Restorative Reproductive Medicine *Defined*

Cycle Charting Analysis (or Evaluation): A review of a patient's cycle chart against the normal parameters of the menstrual cycle as a step in evaluating whether hormonal imbalance is present. If the patient's Cycle Chart reveals patterns that are outside of normal parameter, the patient can be referred for Cycle Care services.

Fertility Awareness-Based Methods of Family Planning: Fertility Awareness-Based Methods (FABM) combine general Body Literacy knowledge with Cycle Charting to assist a woman or couple in determining days of possible fertility. If a couple wishes to conceive, they have the insight needed to time intercourse during moments of peak fertility, increasing their chances of conception. If a couple wishes to avoid pregnancy, they abstain from intercourse and all genital contact on days of possible fertility. *Note Well:* While FABM is the term used in medical literature, they **MUST** be marketed under a different service title in order to attract Gen Z clients, according to our focus groups.

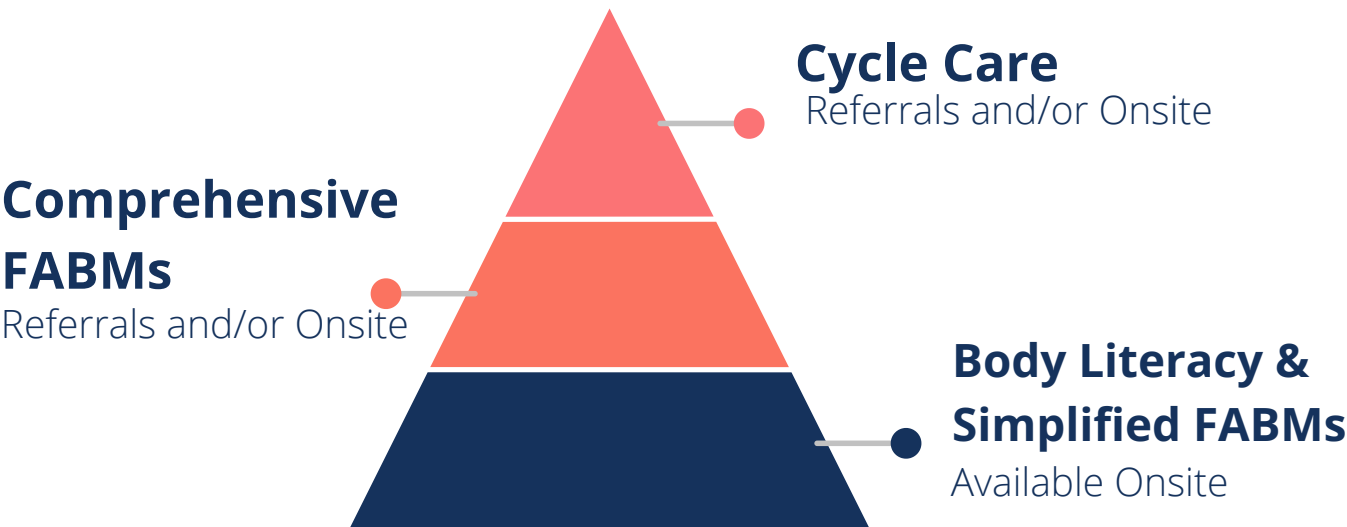
Contraceptive Counseling: Within the context of RRM in the next-generation Pregnancy Center, this education-only appointment seeks to help a woman identify which form of contraception is best for her, while at the same time serve as a powerful tool to deliver baseline Body Literacy education. Armed with an understanding of how her body works in a state of health, the Contraceptive Counseling appointment follows a shared decision-making format, where the patient is encouraged to identify what matters most to her in a method of family planning, and offered targeted education in alignment with her stated goals. Fertility Awareness can be presented each time as a desirable and viable option alongside conventional methods. It must be clear to the patient that the Contraceptive Counseling appointment is for educational purposes only, and that the clinic does not recommend or refer for hormonal contraceptives.

Cycle Care: Using a patient's Cycle Chart as a key diagnostic tool, Cycle Care services are aimed at identifying the root causes of menstrual distress, hormonal imbalance, subfertility and infertility, and applying therapeutic measures to heal the underlying pathology. In addition to the Cycle Chart, Cycle Care services utilize blood serum analysis to investigate levels of specific hormones timed in sync with the female cycle, as well as diagnostic ultrasound. Medical Management interventions may include bio-identical hormonal supplementation, stress management strategies, nutritional programs, sleep evaluation, and changes to other lifestyle factors which may be contributing to the pathology. In some instances, patients may need referral for obstetric surgery aimed at restoring structural integrity and physiological function.

Restorative Reproductive Medicine

A Tiered Approach to RRM in the PMC

Even the smallest Pregnancy Center can easily offer Body Literacy and Simplified Fertility Awareness Methods, increasing access to abortion industry-disrupting holistic women's health education. While ideally we offer Comprehensive FABMs and Cycle Care on site, small centers can create a referral system in order to begin serving within their means.



RRM Division of Labor Example

	Body Literacy	Cycle Charting	Contraceptive Counseling	Simplified FABMs	Comprehensive FABMs	Chart Analysis	Cycle Care
Registered Nurse	●	●	●	●		●	
Nurse Practitioner	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
OB/GYN					●	●	●

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