

## The New FDA-Approved App That Can Help You Avoid a Pregnancy

Period tracking apps are a dime a dozen, but quality fertility charting apps are a little harder to come by —until now. If you're interested in the fertility awareness method or natural family planning but want to spend less time charting, the new FDA-approved fertility app Natural Cycles may be a good fit.

How does it work?

Natural Cycles uses the thermal method to predict when a woman might be fertile. You take your temperature every morning with a basal body thermometer and put that data into the app. It then factors in other things such as sperm survival rate and previous cycle irregularities and lets you know whether you're fertile for that day.

Is it effective?

According to the Stockholm-based company, the app has a 93 percent efficacy rate, but this is going to be very dependent on user consistency, just like with any other fertility awareness method. The app became a certified contraceptive in the European Union last year, but in August, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration finally cleared it to be marketed as a contraceptive in the United States — the first app to ever receive that clearance.

How can it help me?

If you're just getting started into fertility awareness for contraception, having an app take some of the guess work out can be helpful. Natural Cycles uses an easy red and green color-coding scheme to let you know if you're fertile, and it adapts to your individual cycle as you use it.

What should I be aware of?

Basal temperatures can fluctuate depending on how much sleep you got the night before, what time you take your temperature, whether you had any alcohol the night before or if you're getting sick. Any of these factors can lead to inaccurate readings which can increase your risk of a pregnancy.

It also doesn't take into consideration other fertility symptoms such as cervical fluid consistency or cervix position. Because a woman's basal temperature doesn't shift until after ovulation occurs, not including these signs in the algorithm can make it less effective than manual charting.

If you're going to rely on a natural contraceptive method like fertility charting, it's always important to learn as much as you can and use a backup method for the first six months or so while you get used to it and learn more about your individual cycle.