

The Marquette Method of Natural Family Planning

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

Louise Boychuk



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Vitae Fertility Publications
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
www.vitafertility.com
vitafertility@gmail.com

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Introduction

The human body is amazing. Healthy human bodies automatically maintain a perfect balance called homeostasis. This is the body's self-contained, self-communicating system that, for example, keeps internal body temperatures stable. When the body contracts an illness, such as a virus or bacterial infection, it exhibits systemic symptoms. A cold virus can trigger the onset of a sore throat and runny nose. A stomach virus often causes fever, nausea, and generalized weakness. Medical professionals look to the symptoms of a disease to determine the cause. They might also recommend diagnostic tests to reveal further evidence of disease that would otherwise not be readily observable.

Hormones are the body's internal messaging system, and hormone fluctuations cause similarly systemic effects on the body as a whole. The human reproductive system, and women's menstrual cycles in particular, is governed by the ebb and flow of specific reproductive hormones. Changes in a woman's hormone levels over the course of her menstrual cycle cause eggs to develop and prepare the uterine lining to support a fertilized egg. By tracking the systemic symptoms of these hormone fluctuations, women can determine the days in which it is possible to conceive. Some hormone fluctuations, including the luteinizing hormone surge that precedes ovulation, do not exhibit any observable external symptoms, but can still be detected in urine tests.

Natural family planning (NFP) is a method of observing women's natural signs of fertility and using this information either to avoid or achieve pregnancy. Most modern methods of NFP determine the beginning and end of the fertile phase of a woman's cycle by following the observable, tangible symptoms of hormone fluctuations, including mucus, basal body temperature, and cervical position.

What is the Marquette Method of NFP?

The Marquette Method is a high-tech method of NFP that uses the Clearblue fertility monitor to measure urinary hormones directly. The data collected from daily urine tests is used, together with an algorithm, to identify the fertile days within a woman's cycle. The Clearblue fertility monitor measures the woman's estrogen and luteinizing hormone levels, which eliminates the need for her to observe the physical symptoms of fertility. By precisely tracking women's hormone levels throughout their menstrual cycle, the Marquette Method can more precisely identify the beginning and the end of the fertile phase in each cycle, which potentially means less days of abstinence. Research has shown that the Marquette Method, because it tracks hormone levels directly, is one of the most effective forms of NFP available (Bouchard, Fehring, & Schneider, 2013; Fehring & Mu, 2014; Fehring, Schneider, & Raviele, 2011; Fehring, Schneider, Raviele, Rodriguez, & Pruszynski, 2013). For women in regular cycles, the Marquette Method is 98.4% effective in avoiding pregnancy with perfect use, and 98% effective with typical use (Fehring & Schneider, 2017).

The Marquette Method was developed by Dr. Richard Fehring and his team at the Marquette Institute of Natural Family Planning.

Their goal has been to develop an effective, precise method of NFP backed by sound medical research. This process, and their research into human fertility, is ongoing. One purpose of this manual is to make Marquette’s path-breaking, peer-reviewed research accessible to couples using the Marquette Method. The Marquette Institute of Natural Family Planning also trains doctors and Registered Nurses to become Marquette Method instructors who work directly with couples practicing the Marquette Method of NFP. Instructors stay current with the research and recommendations from the institute to provide their clients with the most accurate and up-to-date recommendations emerging from the team’s research.

I undertook my training at the Marquette Institute of Natural Family Planning with Dr. Fehring and his team in 2017 and completed my training in 2018. I am a wife, a mother of three young children, and a Registered Nurse in Alberta, Canada. Through my practice, Vitae Fertility Education, I teach the Marquette Method one-on-one to women and couples. I provide live video teaching sessions to clients around the world, and in-person sessions to local clients. I am dedicated to ensuring my clients can achieve the high levels of effectiveness for which the Marquette Method is known. I have written two comprehensive user manuals to the method, one for women in regular cycles, and a second manual for breastfeeding women. These manuals are closely integrated with my other training materials, and are only available as part of one of my comprehensive teaching packages.

What is the value of a Marquette Method instructor?

This book is not designed to replace professional Marquette Method instruction, which is

why it is only available through Vitae Fertility’s training packages. It was written to complement professional instruction, not replace it. Part of what makes the Marquette Method so effective is that couples have access to a trained medical professional that can personalize the method to their specific circumstances. This manual only covers aspects of the method that are relevant to *all* couples in regular cycles, and does not address aspects of the method that apply only to women with special circumstances. Marquette Method instruction includes teaching sessions tailored to each couple’s specific needs, chart checks ensuring couples apply the method correctly, and answers to any questions that arise in a couples practice of the method. This manual does not provide instructions of how to navigate the Marquette Method in “what if” scenarios — the answers to these questions need to be personalized to each couple’s specific circumstances.

My clients have often remarked that hiring a professionally trained Marquette Method instructor was a wise investment. Many couples self-teach the Marquette Method, but their success with the method varies. All of the Marquette Institute for Natural Family Planning efficacy research has been with couples who received instruction from a professionally trained Marquette Method instructor. Marquette Method instructors are well versed in the male and female reproductive systems, endocrine (hormone) systems, and the impact of general wellness on human fertility. Instructors are trained to personalize the method to each couple’s specific circumstances, preferences, and needs. They begin by assessing their client’s needs, taking into account whether the couple intends to achieve or avoid a pregnancy, and gather information about special circumstances specific to the couple, such as if they are coming off of hormonal birth control or have had difficulty

with other NFP methods in the past. Using this information, instructors modify their teaching and personalize their recommendations for each couple. When Marquette Method users run into problems mid-cycle, their instructor will provide specific advice on how to proceed in order to optimize the method effectiveness. In unusual situations, and for clients with complicated fertility histories, instructors can consult directly with the method developers to determine an approach tailored to the couple's individual situation. NFP can be complicated. Some couples experience difficulty identifying their fertile window, perhaps due to missing a test day, stress, or by misunderstanding the method instructions. Marquette Method instructors are trained in the fine details of the method – how the Clearblue fertility monitor works, how the test strips read hormone levels, how life circumstances might affect a woman's fertility, why the method rules are written the way that they are, and how to navigate confusing cycles. Instructors take the guesswork out of applying the method and provide couples with prompt, accurate answers to questions that arise in every couple's practice of NFP.

The Marquette Institute for Natural Family Planning has posted the basic instructions and a user manual for their method online. In my Marquette Method practice I have found that while these resources are a good introduction to the method, many of my clients desired a deeper level of knowledge and a more comprehensive source of information on the method. They want to know *why* the Marquette Method works and *how* the method achieves such high effectiveness rates. I wrote this manual to address this and to give my clients access to a comprehensive, authoritative source on how to practice the Marquette Method of NFP correctly. One of my goals for this manual was to make the science of the

Marquette Method accessible to a non-specialist audience, and, in so doing, give Vitae Fertility clients a deeper understanding of the *how* and *why* of the method.

This user manual was written for women between the ages of 20 and 42 who are in regular cycles of 24-42 days in length. It should not be used by women with cycles shorter or longer than this average range, or by women who have women's health conditions, are breastfeeding, are approaching menopause, have irregular cycles, are coming off hormonal birth control, or suspect infertility. Women who fall into these categories can still practice the Marquette Method, but should work directly with their Marquette instructor to determine if additional instructions are needed to accommodate their circumstances.

What does this book cover?

This manual is divided into two parts. The first section, "Human Reproduction and Natural Family Planning," is a primer on the biology of human reproduction and on NFP in general. The first chapter of this section outlines the anatomy and physiology of the male and female reproductive systems. Because the Marquette Method monitors women's hormone levels, specific attention is paid to the hormone fluctuations that power the female reproductive cycle. The next chapter of this section explains how NFP works, outlines some of the similarities and differences between the Marquette Method and other methods of NFP, and provides an evidence-based comparison between each NFP method's effectiveness rates.

The second section of this manual, "The Marquette Method of NFP" is divided into four chapters corresponding to each of the four main components of the method – the technology, the day-by-day instructions,

charting, and the instructions for identifying the fertile window. The first chapter, “The Technology,” provides detailed instructions that Marquette Method users need to know to operate their Clearblue fertility monitor correctly. It makes extensive reference to the instruction booklets that come with the monitors, and identifies specific instances where the Marquette Method instructions deviate from the official Clearblue instructions. This chapter also includes detailed information summarizing some of the key research into how the Clearblue fertility monitor functions. The next chapter, “Day-by-Day Testing Instructions” provides Marquette Method users with detailed instructions on what to do on each day of their cycle. The next chapter, “Charting,” describes the specific notation system couples use to record their cycle information. The final chapter of this section, “Instructions for Achieving or Avoiding Pregnancy” brings all the components together to teach couples how to interpret their charts, apply the algorithm, and identify the fertile window in each cycle.