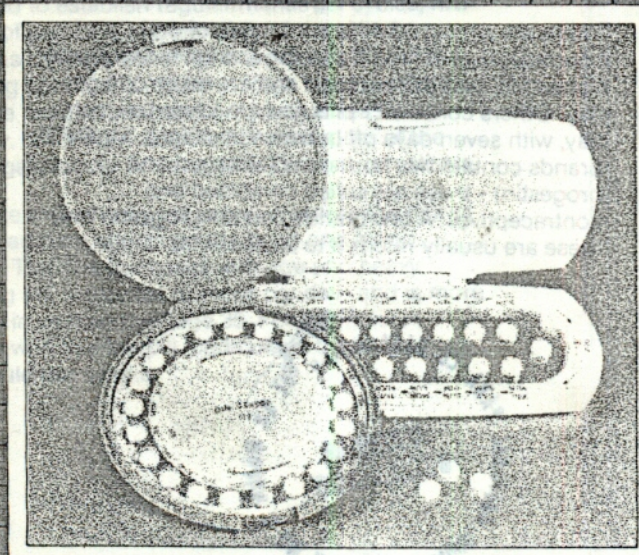


POINTERS ON THE PILL



City of Toronto
Department of Public Health

u are fertile and can become pregnant only on certain days of each menstrual cycle. Being aware of your fertility pattern can improve the use of your chosen birth control method and may help you understand physical and emotional changes you experience each month.

Menstrual cycles vary in length. The "average" 28-day cycle is no more normal than a 23-day or 35-day cycle. Even a woman who has very regular menstrual cycles will have the occasional longer or shorter one. However, the time between ovulation (release of an egg from the ovary) and your next menstrual period is consistently 13-15 days.

During your menstrual cycle the hormones estrogen and progesterone cause many changes in your body. They cause the familiar changes of build-up and shedding of the uterus lining (menstruation), and the growth and release of eggs in the ovaries (ovulation). But there are other, less noticeable changes that also take place.

Changes in the *mucus* at the cervix (opening to the uterus) can also be a sign of fertility. You can notice these changes by checking the moistness or dryness of your vaginal opening. The beginning days of your cycle are fairly dry, but as you get closer to ovulation there is a sticky, creamy discharge. At ovulation the discharge is clear, slippery and very wet (like raw egg white), and dries before your next period. Consequently, wetness is an indication that you are close to, or at, your fertile time.

Your lowest body temperature each day, called *basal body temperature* (BBT), also changes throughout your cycle. BBT is the temperature taken when you first wake up. A chart showing daily BBT will indicate a rise in temperature at ovulation. The increased temperature is maintained until the next period.

The *cervix* (opening to the uterus), which can be felt at the far end of your vagina with the forefinger and feels like the end of your nose, also changes. It becomes softer, more open and stands higher up around ovulation.

All of these signs, or a combination of several, can be used to help you better understand your menstrual cycle. *More information and training is required* to use these signs as the basis for a method of birth control involving periodic abstinence, or to improve your current contraceptive method. If you are interested in learning more about fertility awareness, ask your birth control counsellor or call the number below.

Hotline - 392-7442