

## **Fertility signals can be confusing**

by Tina Smith

Tracking signs of fertility can be a tricky thing.

Most women are fertile for only a few days each month in the middle of their menstrual cycle. Ovulation typically occurs 14 days before bleeding. Some women get clear signals and clues when fertility is approaching and occurring, but others have a harder time detecting the changes in their bodies throughout the month and need a doctor's help.

Three fertility indicators are commonly charted by women at home:

**Basal Body Temperature** – Your body's resting temperature typically is lower during the first two weeks of your cycle prior to ovulation because of the presence of the hormone estrogen. Immediately following ovulation, the follicle that encased the egg starts producing progesterone, which "turns up the heat" a half degree or more until you begin bleeding. This temperature rise can indicate that ovulation has occurred.

**Ovulation Prediction Kits** – The start of ovulation can be detected by the surge of luteinizing hormone. This is the last hormone to peak before ovulation, triggering the rupture of the ovarian sac that releases the egg. LH is not released all at once but rather rises and falls for one or two days, so identifying its presence in your urine can indicate likely ovulation within 12 to 24 hours

**Cervical Mucus** – The fluid in your cervix varies throughout your cycle, based on the amount of estrogen in your bloodstream. Most of the time, the vagina is dry, acidic and even hostile to sperm. Around ovulation, however, it becomes more alkaline and similar to semen, which allows sperm to move and thrive as they wait for an egg. As your cycle progresses, the mucus becomes wetter and develops a sticky quality and then a creamy, stretchy substance at peak fertility. As soon as the egg is released, the fluid tends to dry up very quickly. Checking your cervical mucus several times each day at the vaginal opening can help target when you are most fertile.

The challenges for women who are trying to chart their own fertility are often overwhelming. At least two signals should be charted, often multiple times each day. Types of thermometers and kits vary, and even the best still cannot confirm or pinpoint ovulation precisely. One may already be fertile before a test indicates, and some women have hormonal surges without actually ovulating. Hormone imbalances can skew testing completely.

If attempting to track your fertility becomes too frustrating with ambiguous charts, irregular cycles or inconsistent findings, schedule a consultation with a reproductive specialist who can help you uncover the mysteries surrounding your fertility. Partnering with an expert who has access to a higher level of evaluation and testing options most often eliminates the guesswork.

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