

The Standard Days Method and the TwoDay Method: How can users and programs benefit

Fertility awareness-based methods of family planning help women identify the days each cycle when they are most likely to conceive. If they wish to avoid pregnancy they do not have unprotected sex on these days. The Standard Days Method and the TwoDay method are fertility awareness-based methods of family planning that use very different approaches to identify the fertile days. Both methods were developed by the Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University, to meet the needs of many women for a simple, accurate way to recognize when they need to avoid unprotected intercourse if they wish to prevent pregnancy.

In this presentation we will identify the similarities and differences between the two methods that make each more appropriate for some users to use successfully and for some providers to offer, and will examine the implications of these findings for programs offering the methods. Our data include information from efficacy studies of the two methods, and our experience in offering the Standard Days Method in several ongoing Operations Research studies.

The Standard Days Method

The Standard Days Method identifies days 8-19 (inclusive) as the fertile days for every user in every cycle. It works best for women with cycles that usually range between 26 and 32 days. It is often used with a string of color-coded beads designed to help users keep track of which cycle day they are on and to monitor their cycle lengths.

An efficacy trial of the Standard Days Method, following 478 women for up to 13 cycles of method use in five sites in Bolivia, Peru, and the Philippines, resulted in a 4.8

one-year pregnancy rate with self-reported correct use of the method. A one-year pregnancy rate of 12 was calculated when taking into account all pregnancies, including those occurring in cycles in which users had unprotected intercourse on days identified as fertile (Arévalo et al. 2002).

The TwoDay Method

The TwoDay Method uses a very different approach to identifying the fertile days of the cycle. Users of the TwoDay method are instructed to monitor each day the presence or absence of cervical secretions (of any type) by sensation or observation. They then follow a simple algorithm to determine whether they should consider themselves fertile and avoid unprotected sex on any given day. Each day a user asks herself two simple questions: (a) Did I note secretions today? and (b) Did I note secretions yesterday? If she answers 'yes' to *either* of these questions, she should consider herself fertile on that day. If she answers 'no' to *both* questions, she is probably not fertile (Sinai et al., 1999).

An efficacy trial of the TwoDay Method was recently completed. Results are under embargo until published, but we can say that the method is very efficacious.

Similarities and differences

Both methods require partner support and cooperation, and therefore work best for couples in a stable union. Users of both methods and their partners have to be willing and able to avoid unprotected intercourse each cycle for the duration of the identified fertile period, which is 12 days for the Standard Days Method but is variable for users of the TwoDay method. However there are inherent differences between the methods that

make them better suited for some users and determine who may be able to offer them. For example, the Standard Days Method can be used only by women who usually have cycles between 26-32 days. The TwoDay method can be successfully used by women with any cycle length, but they need to learn to check for the presence or absence of secretions. Another important difference is the number of counseling sessions required. While the Standard Days Method can be easily offered in just one session, the TwoDay method requires at least two visits, to make sure the user can correctly identify the presence or absence of secretions.

In our presentation we will answer the following questions: (1) who can use each method, that is, what determines eligibility; (2) who can successfully provide the method – do only health workers qualify?; and (3) what are the implications of these findings for programs offering the methods?.

Our findings suggest that the methods complement each other. Both methods can be offered by most programs. A substantial number of contracepting women worldwide report using periodic abstinence in an effort to avoid pregnancy. Yet, relatively few users of periodic abstinence have an accurate knowledge of when they are most likely to conceive. The Standard Days Method and the TwoDay Method offer couples better choices.

References

Arévalo M., Jennings V. and Sinai I. (2002). “Efficacy of a new method of family planning: the Standard Days Method.” *Contraception* 65:333-338.

Sinai I., Arévalo M., and Jennings V. (1999). “The TwoDay algorithm: a new algorithm to identify the fertile time of the menstrual cycle. *Contraception* 60:65-70.