

# Learning the Billings Method

## Basic Instruction

### 1 Facts About Fertility

Ovulation (the release of one or more eggs from an ovary) occurs within a 24 hour period and only once during a menstrual cycle.

Day 1 of menstrual bleeding is the first day of the cycle.

The time interval from day 1 to ovulation may vary.

The time interval from ovulation until menstruation is about 2 weeks.

Ovulation will occur early in a short cycle and later in a long cycle.

Observing the cervical mucus symptom gives information about being potentially fertile or infertile on a day by day basis.

The fertility and infertility patterns ahead of ovulation vary from woman to woman.

Once released from the ovary, the ovum (egg) lives for 12-24 hours, unless fertilised.

Sperm cells need suitable cervical mucus to survive and reach the ovum in the Fallopian tube.

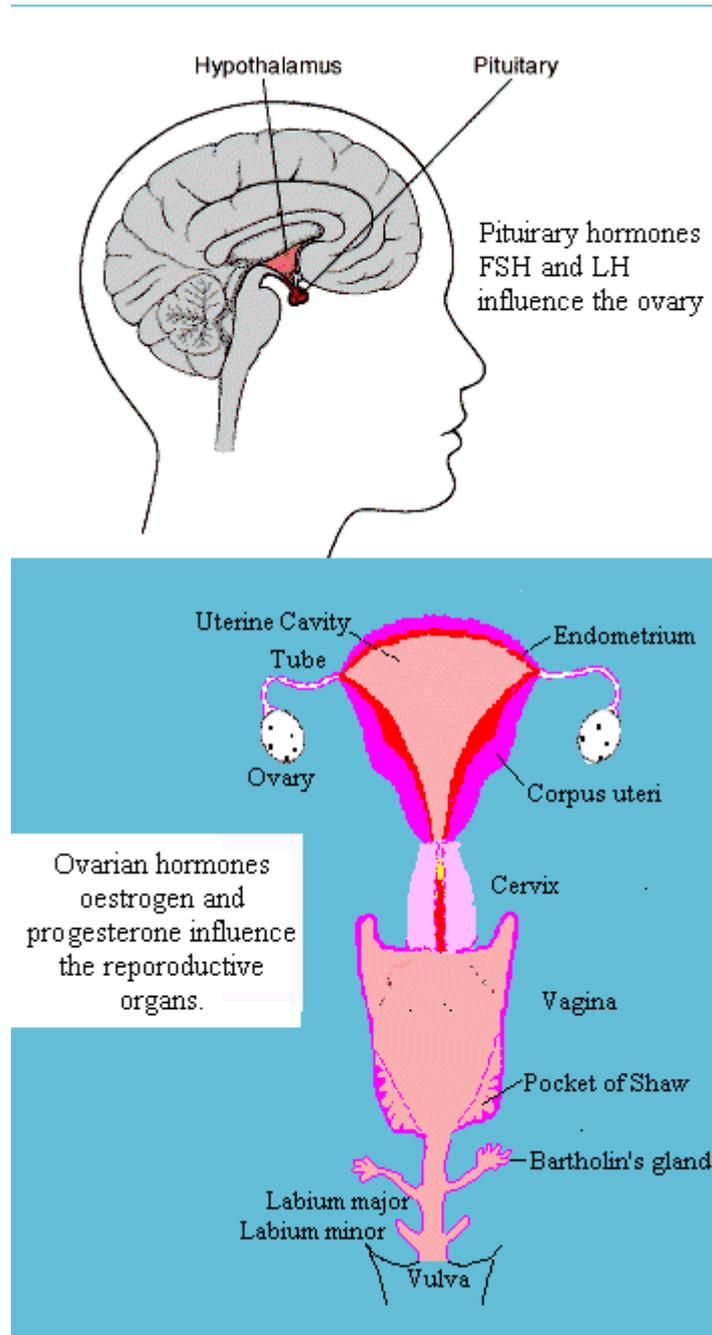
Sperm cells may live for 3-5 days in suitable cervical mucus. At infertile times they will survive in the vagina for only an hour or two.

## 2 Female Physiology

**Ovary** produces the egg at the time of ovulation.

**Cervix** produces different types of mucus.

**Vulva** senses the mucus and the mucus can be observed at the vulva.



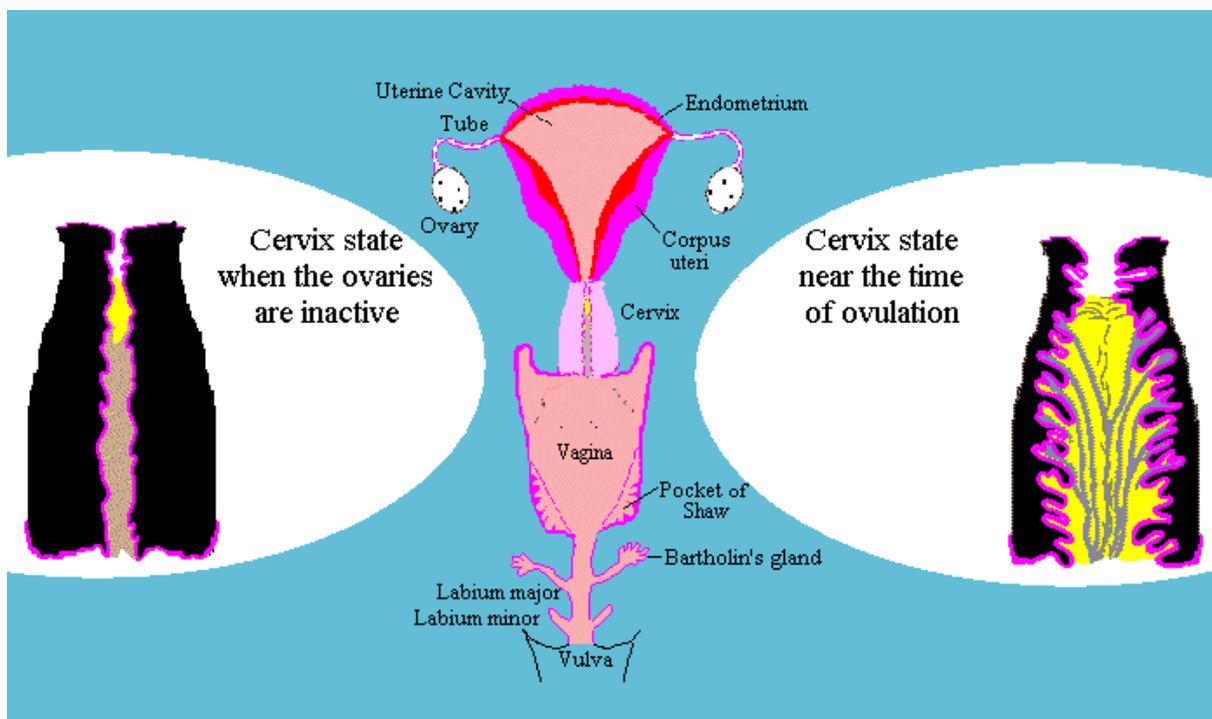
### 3 The Cervix

The cervix is a narrow channel between the vagina and the cavity of the uterus. The behaviour of the cervix is strongly influenced by the ovarian hormones, oestrogen and progesterone.

There are hundreds of crypts in the cervix which secrete different types of mucus. Some types of mucus are viscous and they close the cervix to outside matter.

Other types of mucus are more fluid. When the oestrogen levels rise the crypts secrete fluid types of mucus. These enable sperm cells to move through the cervix towards the fallopian tubes where one can fertilise the egg at the time of ovulation.

Cervical mucus reaches the vulva where it creates various sensations, and its physical characteristics can be observed.



## 4 The Cycle

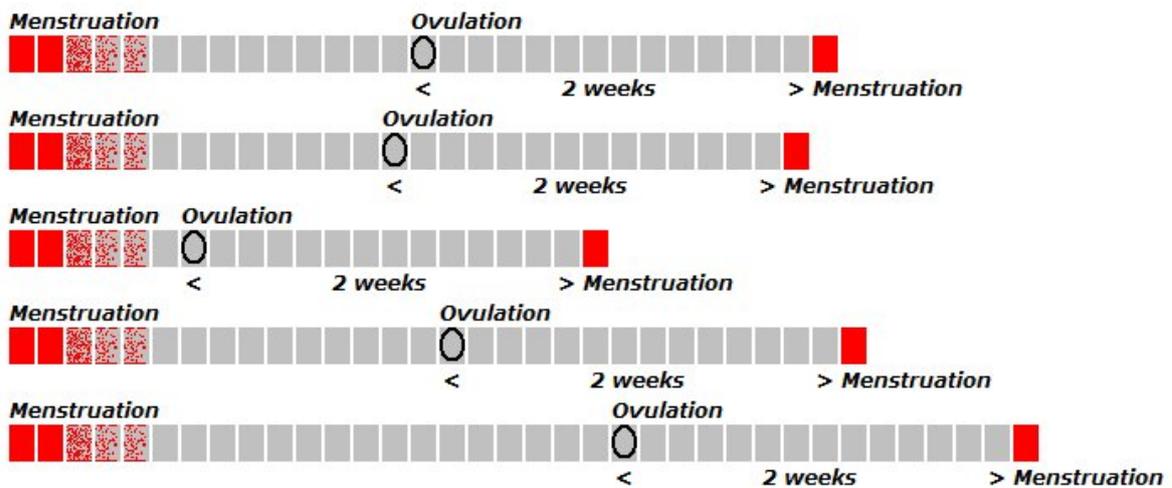
Ovulation--the release of an egg by the ovary--occurs on only one day in the cycle even when more than one egg is released.

Ovulation is followed about 2 weeks later by menstruation, in the absence of pregnancy. Normally the time between ovulation and the next menstruation does not vary to any great extent.

The length of time from the beginning of menstruation up to ovulation can vary. Ovulation is often delayed at times of stress, during lactation and at pre-menopause.

The days around ovulation are the fertile time of the cycle. Once the egg is dead, the period of time until the next menstruation is infertile.

The time between menstruation and ovulation can be short or long. It is only possible to determine whether the fertile days around ovulation might have begun, on a day to day basis.



## 5 The Billings Method

The Billings Method is a means of natural fertility regulation.

The Billings Method is based entirely on the symptoms of fertility and infertility observable at the vulva. It does not use any form of rhythm counting, temperature taking, drugs or devices.

There are four simple rules of the Billings Method which are applied whether the couple wishes to achieve or avoid pregnancy.

Three rules (the Early Day (pre-Peak) Rules) apply to the time up to ovulation, when the peak day of fertility is identified. The fourth rule (the Peak Rule) applies once the Peak Day has been recognised.

The Billings Method is applicable from menarche to menopause, in times of breastfeeding, post hormonal medication and when irregular cycles occur. It is applicable to achieving or avoiding pregnancy. The Billings Method has proven helpful to couples of low fertility in achieving pregnancy and should be the first resort in cases of apparent infertility.

**The use of the Billings Method is not compatible with barrier or hormonal forms of contraception, either during the learning period or for family planning purposes .**

Hormonal medication such as that contained in the Pill and fertility control implants regulate the hormone levels and interfere with the functioning of the cervix, thus distorting the natural symptoms of fertility. It may take some time after ceasing this type of medication for the natural symptoms of fertility to recover.

## 6 Rules of the Method

### Early Day Rules (rules for the pre-ovulatory phase):

- **Rule 1 - avoid intercourse on days of heavy bleeding during menstruation.**  
*[Ovulation might occur quite early in the cycle and menstrual bleeding could obscure mucus.]*
- **Rule 2 - Alternate evenings are available for intercourse when these days have been recognized as infertile. (Basic Infertile Pattern (BIP) )**  
*[Evenings are recommended for intercourse during the BIP as the woman needs to be in an upright position for a few hours for cervical mucus to make its presence felt at the vulva. Seminal fluid on the day following intercourse could obscure the mucus. It is important to allow time for the seminal fluid to disappear and to confirm the BIP is still present by avoiding intercourse on consecutive evenings. ]*
- **Rule 3 - Avoid intercourse on any day of discharge or bleeding which interrupts the Basic Infertile Pattern. Allow 3 days of the Basic Infertile Pattern afterwards before intercourse is resumed on the fourth evening. Rule 2 continues.**  
*[Waiting will enable the woman to either recognise the Peak in which case the Peak Rule is used; or, when the change is an interruption of the BIP caused by raised oestrogens, the hormonal level will return to a basic low level and the woman will recognise a return of the BIP. She counts 3 days to enable the hormones to stabilise before resuming intercourse applying Early Day Rule 2.]*

### The Peak Rule:

- **From the beginning of the fourth day following the Peak until the end of the cycle, intercourse is available every day at any time.**  
*[Ovulation occurs on the Peak Day or days 1 or 2 following the Peak. The egg will live for 12-24 hours unless fertilised. The third day after the Peak is to allow for the life time of the egg. From the fourth day after the Peak the woman is infertile until the end of the cycle and intercourse is available at any time.]*

### To Achieve a Pregnancy

Apply the Early Day Rules.

Postpone intercourse until the slippery sensation occurs.  
Intercourse should occur over the time of the slippery sensation  
and for one or two days after.

### For the Postponement of Pregnancy

- The Early Day Rules and
- The Peak Rule are applied.

## 7 Summary

- The Billings Method is an observation of patterns  
**Potential Fertility** is recognised by a changing, developing pattern of variable length  
**Infertility** is recognised by the unchanging nature of the pattern.
- The Billings Method is scientifically valid yet is simple to use whether the intention is to achieve or avoid pregnancy.
- The keeping of an accurate chart and the correct application of the 4 Rules will enable the couple to manage their fertility naturally.
- It can be effectively used throughout all stages of reproductive life, including following childbirth or miscarriage, while breastfeeding, approaching menopause, or when coming off contraceptive medication, whether cycles are long or short, regular or irregular.
- Independent, international trials have shown the Billings Method to be better than 99% effective for avoiding pregnancy when the guidelines have been followed.
- It is best if both partners are motivated and there is loving co-operation in achieving their joint goals for their family. The use of the Billings Method to avoid pregnancy requires times of waiting without intercourse over the fertile time. The Billings Method is incompatible with the use of barrier methods of contraception, such as condoms, or the practice of withdrawal. Such practices obscure the behaviour of the mucus and make consistently accurate observations impossible.
- As it is completely natural, there are no unhealthy side-effects when using the Billings Method, but more than this, the charting reflects the woman's reproductive health, alerting her to any abnormality, often before other symptoms are revealed. Thus she will seek medical assistance at an early stage, when treatment is most likely to be effective.

### Further Information (Optional)

You may wish to take a look at some of the links listed now or wait until you have more experience with your own charting. You can come back to this point at any time and access these links.

[Hormones and Ovulation](http://www.billingsmethod.org/bom/hormones/index.html) (www.billingsmethod.org/bom/hormones/index.html)

[The Cervix](http://www.billingsmethod.org/bom/cervix/index.html). (www.billingsmethod.org/bom/cervix/index.html)

[The length of the Cycle](http://www.billingsmethod.org/bom/cycles/index.html). (www.billingsmethod.org/bom/cycles/index.html)

[Understanding the Billings Method](http://www.billingsmethod.org/bom/lit/teach/index.html). (www.billingsmethod.org/bom/lit/teach/index.html)

[Observations, Charting and Rules](http://www.billingsmethod.org/bom/rules/index.html) (www.billingsmethod.org/bom/rules/index.html)

[Charts](http://www.billingsmethod.org/bom/rules/chart.html) (www.billingsmethod.org/bom/rules/chart.html)

[The Ovulatory Cycle](http://www.billingsmethod.org/bom/circdiag/index.html). (www.billingsmethod.org/bom/circdiag/index.html)

## 8 Getting Started

You identify the sensations experienced at the vulva as you go about your normal activities. It is these sensations as well as visual observations that you will record on your chart. Do not make internal examinations of the vagina or cervix.

Begin keeping a record immediately. Each evening record your symptoms for the day:

1. **the sensations at the vulva**
2. **any visible discharge noticed**

Keep descriptions brief.

Use one or two words to describe how you feel and what you see.

### Over the Initial Recording Period

The first stage of observation and recording is usually of 2 to 4 weeks duration. It is required that you avoid genital contact during this period in order to avoid confusion by any secretions resulting from intercourse or contact.



Register on billingsMentor at [www.billingsMentor.org](http://www.billingsMentor.org).

Begin recording your observations on the input form provided on the web page.

An example chart showing a record of the 29 days of a cycle with menstruation beginning a new cycle on day 30..

day	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Peak															X															
possibly_fertile																	1	2	3											
wait																														
infertile																														
Sensation	wet	wet	wet	dry	dry	dry	dry	dry	dry	not dry	wet	wet	slippery	slippery	slippery SV*	dry	sticky	sticky	dry	dry	sticky	sticky	moist	moist	dry	dry	dry	dry	wet	wet
Appearance				spotting	spotting					sticky cloudy	cloudy	cloudy stringy	clear stringy	clear	clear	opaque	opaque			cloudy	cloudy	cloudy	cloudy							

SV = swollen vulva