Institute for Reproductive Health
Georgetown University

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IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Couples who use fertility awareness-based methods of family planning have sex just as often as couples who use other contraceptive methods -- they just time it differently, according to a new Georgetown University Institute for Reproductive Health study to be published in a forthcoming edition of the *Journal of Biosocial Science*. The study is now available online on the journal's website.

Fertility awareness-based methods, such as the Institute-developed Standard Days Method® and TwoDay® Method, are also known as natural methods of family planning. These methods enable women to identify the days of the cycle when they are most fertile. During these fertile days couples should avoid unprotected intercourse if they do not want to become pregnant.

"Because those who use natural family planning methods need to avoid unprotected sex for several days each month, many people believe that these methods require great self control. This is simply not the case. This study confirms that couples using natural family planning have intercourse just as frequently as couples using other methods," notes Institute for Reproductive Health Director Victoria Jennings, Ph.D. Jennings is an anthropologist who studies health behavior and culture change and is a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Georgetown University Medical Center.

Use of fertility-awareness based methods strongly influences the timing of sexual activity, report study authors Irit Sinai, Ph.D. and Marcos Arevalo, M.D., both assistant professors of obstetrics and gynecology. They found that couples who use fertility awareness-based methods of family planning to prevent pregnancy engage in more frequent sex before and after the fertile time, and have less sex during fertile days. Frequency of intercourse over the course of the women's cycle is comparable to those of couples using other methods of family planning.

"It's important that the healthcare community let women know that these methods are available, growing in popularity, and that users continue to be satisfied with them. If couples using fertility-awareness based family planning methods were having less sex, this would probably not be the case," said Dr. Arevalo, the Institute's director of biomedical research.

In earlier field trials Institute researchers determined the efficacy of the Standard Days Method and of the TwoDay Method to be to be greater than 95 percent and 96 percent

respectively when used correctly, making them more effective than the condom or diaphragm. The Standard Days Method is for women with cycles between 26 and 32 days long. To use the method effectively, women can use a visual tool called CycleBeads® to monitor their cycle days and identify the days when pregnancy is most likely (days 8 through 19). The TwoDay Method is for women with any cycle length and to use it effectively, users note the presence or absence of cervical secretions; they then avoid unprotected sex on any day with secretions as well as the following day. Additional information on fertility awareness-based family planning can be found on the Institute's website, www.irh.org .

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The Institute for Reproductive Health is dedicated to helping women and men make informed choices about family planning and providing them with simple and effective natural options. As part of Georgetown University's School of Medicine, the Institute conducts research to develop natural methods of family planning and test them in service delivery settings.