



NFPRHA *Report*

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Cycle Beads Make it Easier for Women to Practice Fertility Awareness

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The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University Medical Center has developed a new method of natural family planning called the Standard Days Method™ (SDM). In an international clinical trial of 500 women, this method proved to be more than 95% effective (failure rate less than 5) when used correctly. It is appropriate for women with menstrual cycles between 26 and 32 days long who can avoid unprotected intercourse (by either abstaining or using a barrier method) on days 8 through 19 of their cycles.

A step forward in natural family planning, the SDM relies on a simple device, a color-coded string of beads called CycleBeads™. CycleBeads represent each day of the woman's menstrual cycle. They include 32 beads (a red bead representing the first day of menstrual bleeding, followed by 6 brown beads representing days when pregnancy is very unlikely, then 12 white glow-in-the-dark beads representing days pregnancy is likely, with the remaining brown beads representing days when pregnancy is very unlikely). A small rubber ring, which the woman moves from one bead to the next each day, beginning with the first day of her period, helps her keep track of her cycle days and know when she is fertile and should avoid unprotected intercourse. The developers of CycleBeads say that feedback from users suggests that they facilitate communication between partners about method use and how they deal with the period of time when pregnancy is likely. Women whose menstrual cycles are shorter than 26 days or longer than 32 days, who cannot abstain or use a barrier method during fertile times, or who are not able to negotiate method use with their partners should consider another method. Like all non-barrier methods, the SDM does not protect against sexually

transmitted infections. CycleBeads also provide counselors and educators an opportunity for to promote fertility awareness and an instructional tool for sex education classes.

The Institute for Reproductive Health designed the SDM in response to surveys that showed that the vast majority of women using "periodic abstinence" to avoid pregnancy do not know when they are likely to get pregnant, so their efforts to avoid pregnancy are often unsuccessful. In addition, many women who, for whatever reason, are not attracted to other methods may be interested in the SDM. This method is an important new option that expands family planning choices, particularly for women who want a non-hormonal, non-surgical method.

With support from the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Institute for Reproductive Health is making the SDM and CycleBeads™ available to family planning programs in developing countries, including: Benin, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Turkey. Couples in the United States can purchase CycleBeads™ online at <http://www.cyclebeads.com>, at the end of September. Additional information, support materials and training documents on how to use the SDM can be downloaded from the Institute for Reproductive Health's website at <http://www.ith.org>. The Institute for Reproductive Health will be presenting at the upcoming NFPRHA Board and Committee meeting, September 26 to 28.