

Standard Days Method of Family Planning

*Provider Job Aids Packet for
Counseling Clients*



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The Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., is a leading technical resource in Natural Family Planning and a learning center committed to developing and increasing the availability of effective and easy-to-use natural methods.

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Standard Days Method

Provider Job Aids Packet for Counseling Clients

About the SDM

The Standard Days Method (SDM) is a Fertility Awareness-based method of family planning developed by the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University. Fertility Awareness is the knowledge of the woman's menstrual cycle and her fertility to determine on which days she is likely to get pregnant. More than 95% effective for women with menstrual cycles between 26 and 32 days long¹ (approximately 80% of cycles are within this range), the SDM is based on the fact that there are certain days during a woman's menstrual cycle when she can become pregnant. To prevent pregnancy, the woman identifies days 8 through 19 of her cycle and avoids unprotected sex on these days. Women who use the SDM can rely on CycleBeads, a color-coded string of beads, to help them track their fertile days.

About Counseling in the SDM

The counseling required to support quality provision of the SDM includes three key components:

1) Assess— helping women determine if the method is appropriate for them, 2) Teach— explaining how the method works; and 3) Support—helping women and their partners manage the fertile days. SDM counseling can generally be provided in one client visit. However, each program and provider may determine if a follow-up visit is required, and the client should be encouraged to return for additional information and services as appropriate.

About this Packet

This packet of job aids includes four tools that a service provider can use to offer SDM counseling to clients. Instructions on how to use each tool are included in this packet. The materials in this packet are:

- **Screening Checklist and Provider Cue Card**

On one side, this job aid helps the provider apply the method eligibility criteria to determine if the SDM is appropriate for the woman based on her cycle length, special circumstances—such as previous method use, recent pregnancy—and couple situation.

On the other side, this job aid reminds the provider of the key points to cover when providing the method instruction. It includes general information on CycleBeads, how to use them correctly, and when the woman should contact her provider.

- **For Follow-up Visit**—a job aid that helps the provider determine if the woman or couple still meets the criteria for using the method and if they are having any problems using the SDM.
- **FAQs**—a list of frequently asked questions related to SDM provision and use.

For additional information and resources on the SDM and CycleBeads, visit the Institute's website at www.irh.org.

¹ Arévalo M, Jennings V, Sinai I. Efficacy of a new method of family planning: the Standard Days Method, *Contraception*. 2002; 65: 333-338.

Who Can Use the Standard Days Method® (SDM)

Screening Checklist

A woman can use the SDM if she meets BOTH of these conditions:

- She has most cycles between 26 and 32 days long, **and**
- She and her partner can use condoms or avoid sex on the fertile days.

Determine Whether the SDM is Appropriate for the woman

1

Are her periods about a month apart (cycles between 26 and 32 days)?

Ask: ☞ Do your periods usually come when you expect them?

☞ Do your periods usually come about once a month?

Periods that usually come about once a month indicate her cycles are between 26 and 32 days long.

☞ When was the first day of your most recent period?

If the client knows the first day of her last period and confirms her periods come about once a month, she can start using the SDM immediately.

If the client does not know the first day of her last period, she will have to wait until her next period to start the method.

2

Can she and her partner avoid unprotected sex on the fertile days?

The Standard Days Method does not protect against HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections.

Consider circumstances that can affect cycle length:

If she is POSTPARTUM or BREASTFEEDING

- ☞ Has she had four periods since her baby was born?
- ☞ Were her last two periods about a month apart?

If she recently used the 3-MONTH INJECTION

- ☞ Have three months passed since her last shot? Have her periods returned?
- ☞ Were her last three periods about a month apart?

If she recently used the PILL, PATCH, 1-MONTH INJECTION, IMPLANT, HORMONAL IUD, or RING

- ☞ Were her periods about a month apart prior to using any of these methods?
- ☞ Were her last three periods, since stopping the method, about a month apart?

If she had a NON-HORMONAL IUD

- ☞ Were her periods about a month apart while using the IUD?
- ☞ Were her last two periods about a month apart?

If she recently had a MISCARRIAGE or an ABORTION OR used EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION

- ☞ Were her last two periods about a month apart before getting pregnant or using EC?

If the answer to ALL questions is “YES,” the method is appropriate for the woman.

How to Use CycleBeads®

Provider Cue Card

CycleBeads are based on the Standard Days Method (SDM), a natural family planning method more than 95% effective when used correctly.

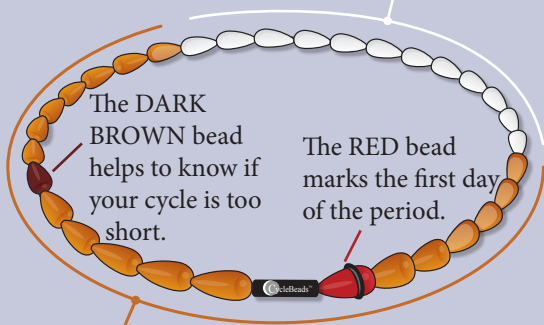
A woman can use this method if her cycles last between 26 and 32 days.

Women who have their periods about once a month have cycles in this range.

CycleBeads help a woman know when to use condoms or avoid sex to prevent a pregnancy.

CycleBeads represent the menstrual cycle. Each bead is a day of the cycle.

The WHITE beads represent days when a woman CAN GET PREGNANT.

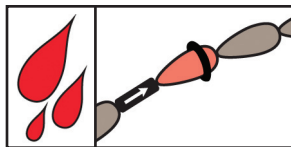


The BROWN beads represent days when pregnancy is unlikely.

When can a woman who meets the eligibility criteria start using the CycleBeads?

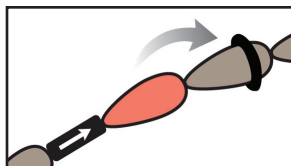
- If she can remember the day her last period started, she can start using CycleBeads immediately.
- If she does not remember the date her last period started, she can begin using CycleBeads when her next period starts.
- If she recently was pregnant, is breastfeeding or if she recently used another method, she can start using CycleBeads when her next period starts provided she meets the conditions pertaining to her circumstance.

How to Use CycleBeads



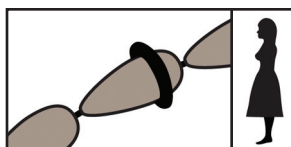
On the first day of your period, move the ring to the RED bead.

Also mark that day on your calendar.



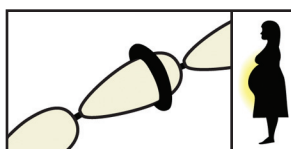
Every morning move the ring to the next bead. Always move the ring in the direction of the arrow.

Move the ring even on days when you have your period.



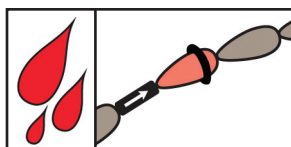
When the ring is on a BROWN bead you can have sexual intercourse.

These are days when pregnancy is very unlikely.



When the ring is on any WHITE bead, use a condom or avoid sex to prevent pregnancy.

These are days when you can get pregnant if you have unprotected sex.



The day your next period starts, move the ring to the RED bead again. Skip over any remaining beads. Your period signals that a new cycle has started.

Be sure your cycles are in range:

- If you start your period before you put the ring on the DARK BROWN bead, that cycle is less than 26 days.
- If you have not started your period by the day after you put the ring on the last BROWN bead, that cycle is longer than 32 days.

If more than once in a year your cycle is shorter than 26, or longer than 32 days, this method will not work for you. See your provider.

If you forget whether you moved the ring, check in your calendar when your period began. Count the days since your period began and move the ring the same number of beads starting with the RED bead.



When to Contact Your Provider

Contact your provider if:

- you think you might be pregnant
- you had more than one cycle out of range in a year
- you had unprotected sex on a white bead day



Use your family planning method continuously.

For the health of the mother and the baby, wait at least 2 years before trying to become pregnant again.

Standard Days Method

How to Use the SDM “Initial Visit” Screening Checklist

Who can use the SDM?

A woman can use the method if her periods are about a month apart (cycles between 26 and 32 days long) and if she and her partner can avoid unprotected sex during the fertile days. This screening checklist will help providers determine if the woman and couple meet the method eligibility criteria. It begins with questions pertaining to the woman and then moves on to questions pertaining to the couple.

Women with periods about a month apart (menstrual cycles between 26 and 32 days long)

The first section begins with questions that help the provider and the woman determine if she has regular periods about a month apart.

1 Does the woman have regular cycles between 26 and 32 days? This question is designed to help the provider determine if the woman has cycles within the range recommended for SDM users. The woman’s cycle length includes all days between the first day of her last period and the day before she expects her next period.

Recommended Questions: How often do you get your periods? Do your periods usually come when you expect them? Do your periods come about a month apart? Do your periods ever come earlier or later than you expect them? All women will have some variability with their menstrual cycles. Having periods about a month apart is a good indicator that her cycles are within the appropriate range.

Women under special circumstances

Providers should determine if the woman recently had a pregnancy, currently is breastfeeding or using/has recently used a hormonal method of family planning, as these circumstances may affect cycle length. If any of these circumstances apply, ask her the questions pertaining to her special circumstance (see questions 2 through 6).

2 If she is postpartum or breastfeeding, has she had 4 periods (3 consecutive cycles) since her baby was born? Were her last 2 periods about a month apart? These questions are designed to help the provider determine if a postpartum or breastfeeding woman is having regular menstrual cycles. She can start using the SDM only if she has had at least four normal periods (3 consecutive menstrual cycles), and her last two periods were about a month apart (cycle within 26-32 day range).

Recommended questions for postpartum or breastfeeding women: How old is your youngest child? Are you currently breastfeeding? Has your period returned? How many periods have you had since your baby was born? Are your periods regular again? Were your last 2 periods about a month apart?

3

If she recently used the 3-month contraceptive injection, have three months passed since her last shot? Has her period returned? Were her last two periods about a month apart? Since the three-month injection frequently causes changes in the woman's menstrual cycle, it is important for the service provider to ensure that the woman has stopped using the method and three months have passed since her last injection. It is also important to determine whether her two most recent periods were about a month apart (cycle between 26 and 32 days).

Recommended questions for previous users of the 3-month injection: When did you have the last injection? When were you supposed to get your next injection? Since your last injection, have you had your period? Were your two most recent periods about a month apart? Before using the injection, did your periods start when you expected them? How often did you get your period?

4

If she recently used the contraceptive pill: This question is designed to determine if the woman regularly had periods about a month apart before using these hormonal methods. After stopping the pill, a woman should use a backup method for at least two months and track her cyclelength. She should wait until her last two periods are about a month apart before starting the SDM.

Recommended questions for previous users of the contraceptive pill: When did you stop the pill? Since you stopped the pill, are your periods about a month apart? Were your periods about a month apart before using the pill? Were your two most recent periods about a month apart?

5

If she recently used the patch, 1-month contraceptive injection, implant, hormonal IUD, ring or emergency contraception, were her periods about a month apart prior to using any of these methods? This question is designed to determine if the woman regularly had periods about a month apart before using these hormonal methods. If a woman is still using another hormonal method, she is also advised to begin using the SDM on the day she starts her next period.

6

If she was using a non-hormonal IUD, has it been removed? Were her periods about a month apart while using this IUD? Were her last two periods about a month apart? This question is designed to ensure that a previous IUD user has had it removed and that her cycles were about a month apart while she was using it. If a woman still has the IUD at the time she gets information on the SDM, she should be advised to wait until it has been removed. After the IUD has been removed, she can begin using the SDM immediately if she remembers the first day of her last period. However, if she does not remember this date, she should begin using the SDM on the day her next period starts.

7

If she recently had a miscarriage or an abortion, were her periods about a month apart before getting pregnant? This question is designed to determine if the client's menstrual cycles prior to getting pregnant were about a month apart (26 to 32 days). If yes, the woman can begin using the SDM on the day her next period starts.

Recommended questions for a woman with a recent miscarriage or abortion: Before you were pregnant, did your periods come when you expected them? Has any bleeding related to the loss of your pregnancy stopped? Have you started having your period again?

Couples who can avoid unprotected sex during the fertile days

This section of the checklist is designed to identify and explain issues related to the couple relationship and how to assess whether they can use the method effectively. In general, it is designed to help the provider determine if the method is appropriate for the couple based on relationship issues and the degree of communication that exists, whether there is any risk of STIs, and how likely they are to be able to manage the woman's fertile days.

8 **Do both partners want to avoid pregnancy at this time?** This question is important to confirm that both partners do not want a pregnancy at this time and whether both partners would agree to use the method and be motivated to avoid unprotected sex. A conflict between partners regarding pregnancy intentions would make it very difficult for the couple to avoid unprotected sex on the white bead days, an essential requirement of the SDM. If the couple does not have open communication regarding pregnancy intentions, or does not agree on pregnancy avoidance, then the SDM may be a difficult method for them to use.

Recommended question: Are you able to discuss openly and freely with your partner whether you want to have children? Have you and your partner talked about when you want to have a child (your next child)? Have you agreed that it is important to both of you not to get pregnant right now? Have you discussed using a family planning method?

9 **Do both partners think they can avoid unprotected sex on days when the woman can get pregnant?** This question is designed to help the user and provider identify whether the couple might have problems avoiding unprotected sex. The question is also meant to identify whether the woman is able to tell her partner on any given day whether or not she wants to have sex and whether her partner respects and supports that decision.

Recommended questions: How do you think your partner would feel about avoiding unprotected sex on the white-bead days? What about you? What will you and your partner do to prevent pregnancy during the fertile days? Can you think of situations when avoiding sex might create a problem in your relationship? What has your partner's reaction been in the past when you haven't wanted to have sex? Have both of you talked about what you will do to prevent pregnancy during the fertile (white bead) days? How might you and your partner let each other know on which days you can have sex? What problems do you think you both may have using this method?

10 **Are both partners free of risk for sexually transmitted infections?** This question is designed to determine if the woman perceives that there may be a risk of sexually transmitted infection (STI) and to inform her that the SDM does not protect against HIV/AIDS or STIs. In circumstances where either partner has sex with more than one person, there may be a risk.

Recommended questions: People who have sex with more than one person are at risk for getting a sexually transmitted infection. Since you have been involved with your current partner, have either of you been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection? How likely is it that either of you might be at risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection?

When can a woman who meets the eligibility criteria start using the SDM? If she has decided to use the SDM, help her determine when she can begin using the method.

- Women who remember the date of their last period can start using the method immediately by placing the ring on the correct bead. For a woman who is past cycle day 7 when she starts the SDM, tell her she may already be pregnant if she has had unprotected sex this cycle.
- Women who don't remember the start date of their last period can begin using the SDM on the first day of their next period. They should use another method until they can start the SDM.
- Women who are post-partum or breastfeeding should wait until they have four periods and the last two are about a month apart to start using the SDM.
- Women who have recently used the 3-month injection should wait until 3 months have passed since the last shot and her last two periods are about a month apart.
- Women who have recently stopped the pill should use a back-up method for at least two months while tracking her cycle. When her last two periods are about a month apart (cycles between 26-32 days long), she can start using the SDM.
- Women who have recently used another hormonal method, and women who have had a miscarriage, abortion, or used emergency contraception and who had periods about a month apart prior to using the hormonal method, miscarriage or abortion can start the SDM on the first day of their next period. These women should use a back-up method until they're able to start using the SDM.

After using this screening checklist for the initial visit, providers can use the Cue Card included in this packet to explain how to use CycleBeads to the client.

Standard Days Method® and CycleBeads®:

Frequently Asked Questions from Service Providers and Clients

1 What if a woman forgets whether or not she has moved the ring on her CycleBeads? We recommend that a woman who uses CycleBeads also use a calendar to mark the first day of her cycle – the day her period starts. That way, if she is not sure whether or not she has moved the ring on any particular day, or whether it may have been moved accidentally, she can check her calendar. To confirm that the ring is on the correct bead, she counts from the day she started her period up until today, and then counts the same number of beads. The ring should be on the corresponding bead on her CycleBeads.

2 How do couples normally manage the 12-day fertile time? Couples have used different strategies for managing the fertile time. The method allows users to be aware of the days during the menstrual cycle when there is a possibility of pregnancy. Couples who use the SDM may choose to manage their fertile days in different ways. Some couples prefer to avoid intercourse completely during the fertile days. Other couples prefer to use condoms or other barrier methods during the fertile days. The most important element, however, to managing the fertile period is open communication between both partners.

3 Can a woman use the SDM if she recently had a baby and hasn't started her period yet? No, she needs to wait until she starts her period. As soon as she has had at least 4 normal periods (i.e. 3 menstrual cycles) and her last 2 periods are about a month apart, she can start using the SDM.

4 Can a woman use the SDM if she is breastfeeding? That depends. If a woman is breastfeeding and she hasn't had her period since her baby was born, this method won't work for her. She needs to wait until she starts having her period again. Even then, it is important to understand that women who are breastfeeding are less likely to have regular cycles. This is because of the additional hormones in their bodies related to breastfeeding. If a breastfeeding woman wants to use the SDM, she should wait until she has had at least 4 regular periods (i.e. 3 cycles) and her last two periods are about a month apart.

5 Can a woman use the SDM if she just stopped taking the pill? If her periods before she started taking the pill came about a month apart, she can start using CycleBeads when her last three periods have been about a month apart (about 26 to 32 day cycles). If she is still using the pill and wants to use the SDM, we recommend that she finish taking her current pack. Then, she should use a backup method while she waits for three periods to come about a month apart.

6 Can a woman use the SDM if she just stopped taking an injectable form of birth control? It depends. If she was using the 1-month injection, and her periods before she started using the injection came about a month apart, she can start using CycleBeads when her last three periods after stopping the injection have been about a month apart (about 26 to 32 days). If she is using the 1-month injection and wants to use the SDM, she should stop the injection use a backup method while she waits for three periods to come about a month apart.

If the woman has taken the three-month injection, however, it may be a while before her cycles return to normal. Therefore, she'll need to wait until 3 months have passed since she received her last injection, and her last three periods have come about a month apart. Then she can start using the SDM.

7 Can a woman use the SDM if she just stopped using a non-hormonal IUD? Yes, as long as her cycles during the use of the IUD were between 26 and 32 days long. IUDs do not affect a woman's cycle length.

8 Can a woman use the SDM if she has recently used emergency contraception? Yes, if her periods are usually about a month apart. If she uses emergency contraception, she should wait until she starts her next period (not to be confused with bleeding associated with the use of emergency contraception) and then begin using the method. Usually, when a woman has used emergency contraception,

the cycle in which she used the emergency contraception is affected by the hormones in the emergency contraception pills. But as soon as she starts her next period, she will most likely return to her usual cycle length.

9 Can a woman use the SDM if she recently had an abortion or miscarriage? Yes, if her cycles are usually about a month apart. If she recently had an abortion or miscarriage, she should wait until she starts her next period (not to be confused with bleeding associated with the abortion or miscarriage) and then begin using the method.

10 Why does the CycleBeads instructional insert suggest that all women start using CycleBeads on the first day of their next period and the provider resource materials recommend that a woman start using the method immediately if she remembers the start date of her last period? The CycleBeads instructional insert was developed assuming that a woman could purchase CycleBeads independently and start using it without visiting a service provider. In this case, it is recommended that she start using the method on the first day of her next period so that she is exactly sure of her start date. On the other hand, the provider resource materials recommend allowing women to begin to use the method immediately-if she can remember the start date of her last period and she meets all other eligibility criteria. The fact that she knows the start date of her most recent period enables her to know exactly where to place the ring on the CycleBeads and begin using the Standard Days Method. The option of starting the method at any time during her cycle requires that the provider assess how accurately the woman is recalling the start date of her last period. If there is any doubt, she should start the method on the first day of her next period.

11 What if the woman thinks that she might be pregnant? If the woman thinks she might be pregnant or if 42 days or more have passed since her last period started, she should be referred for a pregnancy test. If the pregnancy test is negative and this is the first

time that her cycle is out of the 26-32 day range, she may continue to use the method with caution. She should return if she has a delayed period again. If the test is positive, offer her appropriate counseling and refer the woman for prenatal care.

12 What if the woman reports bleeding between periods? In case of minor spotting, inform the woman that this is a normal sign of impending ovulation, rather than a sign of a health problem. Otherwise, counsel her according to the service delivery guidelines or refer her for an assessment for unusual vaginal bleeding. When should the woman move the ring to the red bead: when she starts spotting or when she starts with a full flow? She should move the ring to the red bead on the first day that she notices initial spotting, regardless of the flow. What happens if the woman gets her period before placing the ring on the dark brown bead? This means that her menstrual cycle was less than 26 days long. If this happens more than once in a year, CycleBeads will not work for her. What happens if the woman does not get her period after reaching the last brown bead? If she does not get her period by the day after she places the ring on the last brown bead, it means that her menstrual cycle was more than 32 days long. If this happens more than once in a year, CycleBeads will not work for her.

13 Does this method protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs)? No. Like most other family planning methods, the SDM does not protect couples from STIs. If a woman thinks she or her partner are at risk of an STI, or if she thinks she may have an STI, she should consult her healthcare provider immediately.



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