

Getting Down with your Cycle

Learn Its Language, Love Its Work



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BRILLANT
BODIES

This work was a collaboration between At The Well & Brilliant Bodies

We are both working in service of the female body & care deeply about waking our sisters up to the divinity that flows within us. It is made with serious love & meant to START the conversation.

We all know about periods – how could we miss them? But the female body is an “extraordinary machine” (thanks, Fiona Apple). Over the course of a month, all kinds of miraculous processes brew up inside us, without our effort or even our awareness. About that second thing though, the lack of awareness – let’s change that.

Learning the workings of your menstrual cycle can be one of the most inspiring, eye-opening, and self-enlightenment inducing quests you’ll embark on. Like, ever. If you’ve heard of cycle tracking, it may have been from a woman who was trying to get pregnant. But cycle tracking is not just for aspiring mamas. The sooner you know what’s going on inside that extraordinary machine of yours, the sooner you can start bringing yourself into empowered balance, not to mention spiritual connection. If you’re super On It, you can even use cycle tracking as a non-hormonal form of birth control.¹

Our cycles reveal a lot about our inner ecosystems overall, and if you start tracking, you may even be able to heal some other ailments along the way. Six months is typically a good amount of time to get a sense of this month-long party in your lady parts. (But, if you’re coming off hormonal birth control, you might be in for a longer wait; It can take a few months before you start cycling consistently again).

Homegirls! A note: This quick guide is meant to get you acquainted with your cycle, not to help you prevent pregnancy or conceive. If you’re looking to pop a bun in that oven or track your cycle as a form of birth control, we highly recommend learning how to track/chart while working with a FAM practitioner (Fertility Awareness Methods) or a fertility acupuncturist.

Cool? Ok, let’s get started.

1. Disclaimer: You need to know your body. Track it, it takes many moons to learn your rhythms. We know natural fertility awareness method works 100% of the time, as long as you follow your rules 100% of the time.



Tracking: It's all about 3 things:

- 1. Waking Temperature**
- 2. Cervical Fluid**
- 3. Cervical Position**

1

Waking Temperature: The Ovulation Tip-Off

What to Do

Take your temperature every morning at roughly the same time in the 5am-8:30am window. Do this before you do anything else. Seriously, anything else. No sexy time, no peeing, no water. Set your alarm, half-wake up, take your temp, write it down, then go back to sleep if you want.

If that sounds like too much effort, there are a handful of bomb cycle tracking apps out there. We love Kindara and Daysy. Kindara even developed Wink, a thermometer that syncs with your phone to create a cycle tracking chart, with no effort on your part. Now that's what we call making technology work for us (you know – women).

Tips: Your Temperature is a Major Diva

Your temperature is a little...well, temperamental. Here are some things that can impact your reading. Make note of these factors whenever you chart your cycle. That way, you'll know what's up if the numbers look weird.

- *Having a fever*
- *Drinking alcohol the night before*
- *Getting less than 3 hours of sleep*
- *Traveling*
- *Taking your temp at a different time than usual*
- *Using an electric blanket, heating pad, or any other heating device*

Say It With Us, “Bi-Phasic BBT”

Your temperature stays lower before you ovulate than after. It typically shifts at least .4F. After you ovulate, your temperature will rise, and if you're pregnant, it will stay high. As you start bleeding, your temperature will drop again.

In the morning, you want to measure your basal body temperature (BBT), your body's lowest possible temperature in 24-hours. Looking at a string of temperatures over a few weeks time will tell you where you are in your cycle. Just sitting up in bed can mess with your BBT, thus our insistence that you take your temperature before anything else. Also, you'll need to a basal thermometer, which picks up super-minute temperature changes in the body. You can find these at most drugstores.

**Remember, your temperature shift is a confirmation of ovulation. It's not a crystal ball; it doesn't show when you're going to ovulate or when you're most fertile.*



2

Cervical Fluid: How Fertile Are You Now?

What to Do

Here's how to get in deep with your cervical fluid. Each time you use the bathroom do the following:

- **Before You Go**, separate the vaginal lips and check for cervical fluid at the lower opening closest to your perineum (the area between your vulva and anus). What'd you find, Nancy Drew? Take note...
- **While Wiping**, notice if the toilet paper easily slides across your vaginal lips, or if it's dry.
- **Before You Toss the TP**, check the toilet. Sometimes you'll see thick, globby, fertile fluid there. Sometimes, the fertile fluid forms a little ball when it hits the water. Take note of what you find.

Throughout the day, focus on vaginal sensation. (#FeelinYourself.) Can you feel wetness? Do you feel fluid coming out of you?

Check your underwear. Because the fluid has typically dried before you get to see it here, this can be a bit tricky. But generally speaking, fertile fluid will expand in a circle and/or may look like little blobs.

Why

Paying attention to the nature of your cervical fluid is the best way to know when you're the most fertile. The fluid will even tell you, within a few days, when you're most likely to ovulate. Throughout your cycle, the quality and color of your cervical fluid will change. Generally, it goes something like this (but remember, every woman is different):

- **Menstruation** – blood, glorious blood
- **Dry** (Though some women skip this stage)
- **Sticky** (Not very fertile, but in some cases, conception happens)
- **Creamy** (Not very fertile, but in some cases, conception happens)
- **Slippery/Egg-White** (This fluid is the most fertile!)
- **Dry or Sticky** (The last day of feeling that lubricative sensation is the peak day of your fertility. Once you start feeling dry and/or sticky again, you're no longer fertile.)
- **Menstruation Again**

Tips: Not When You're Hot & Bothered

Don't check your cervical fluid when you're sexually aroused, or shortly after semen has entered your body. What's lubrication? What's semen? What's cervical fluid? Who knows! It is very hard to tell the difference.

3

Cervical Position: You in Your Cycle?

What to Do

In the shower, squat and insert your (clean) middle finger waaaay up there. Once you reach a little “road block” and you can’t go any further, congratulations, you’ve found your cervix!

As you check, notice what your cervix SHOWs:

- **Softness** (*firm, medium, or soft*)
- **Height** in the vagina (*low, midway, or high*)
- **Opening** (*closed, partially open, or open*)
- **Wetness** (*dry, sticky, creamy, or slippery*)

The Ovulation Tip-Off #2

There’s great value in getting to know your cervix; it’s literally your body’s doorway to life, and your partner has probably interacted with it more than you.

As you approach ovulation, the cervix tends to rise, soften and open. It goes from feeling firm like the tip of your nose (not fertile), to feeling soft like your lips (fertile). It also drops into the vagina (easier to access).

**Remember, the cervix changes during pregnancy too; only after a few months, when you develop a good sense of how your personal cervix reliably changes, will this method yield helpful information.*

Tips: Cervix Tracking Like a Pro

Begin checking one day after your period ends. If you feel overwhelmed by the steps so far, leave this one to take on once you’re in a groove with BBT and cervical fluid tracking; of the Big Three, cervical position is the least accurate sign of fertility and ovulation.



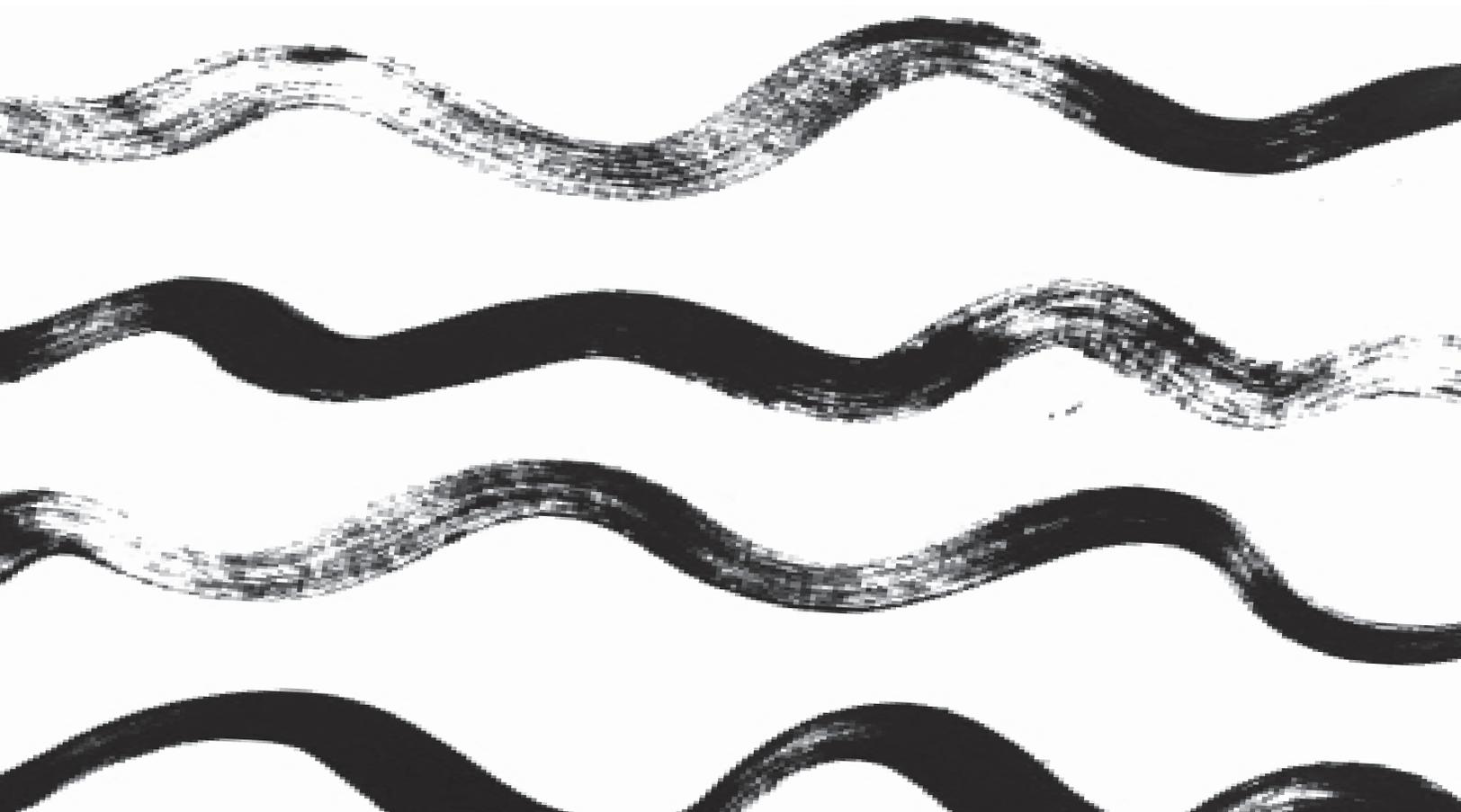
Parting Words

Cycle tracking, how we lurve you. Really, we could go on and on. There's so much to nerd out on when it comes to this fascinating process.

For now, we'll leave you here, hopefully feeling a little more connected to your magical and mysterious inner workings, and curious to invest some time and care in getting to know your body – and yourself – better.

Next Steps

Hey, keep this learning going! Start a Menstruation journal and track what you notice as you move through your moon. Yes, we mean write down your cervical fluid findings, your body sensations, the color of your blood, your emotional signaling, and your noticing of the mind. Kindara and Daysy also make these notes super-easy to jot down in-app. You can also check out At The Well's lunar tracking (on our newsletters) for a lil' inspiration and help.



Well Circle Activity: Wolf Tracking

Soooo what if your entire circle started tracking? Wouldn't that be a beautiful thing? Don't you think you'd learn a lot? We do! Each woman doing the personal work to connect with her body, get intimate with the divine, natural beauty of her cycle, and then, together... you all talk about it.

Shame and secrecy about blood, about cervical fluid, and textures? Throw that out the window. Please please do this. Homegirls, it's time to progress what we know about the female body. This starts by knowing yourself. And working in packs.

Important Resources:

At The Well: *Jewish Women's Wellness*
www.atthewellproject.com

Brilliant Bodies: www.ourbrilliantbodies.com

More or less the Torah on Fertility Tracking :
Taking Charge of Your Fertility by Toni Wechler.
You can find more info at www.tcoyf.com

Legit list of Fertility Awareness Educators.
www.fertilityawarenessprofessionals.com

Please Remember:

Reading this document is not grounds for substituting birth control, please see a FAM professional if you want to start incorporating FAM into your personal practices.

