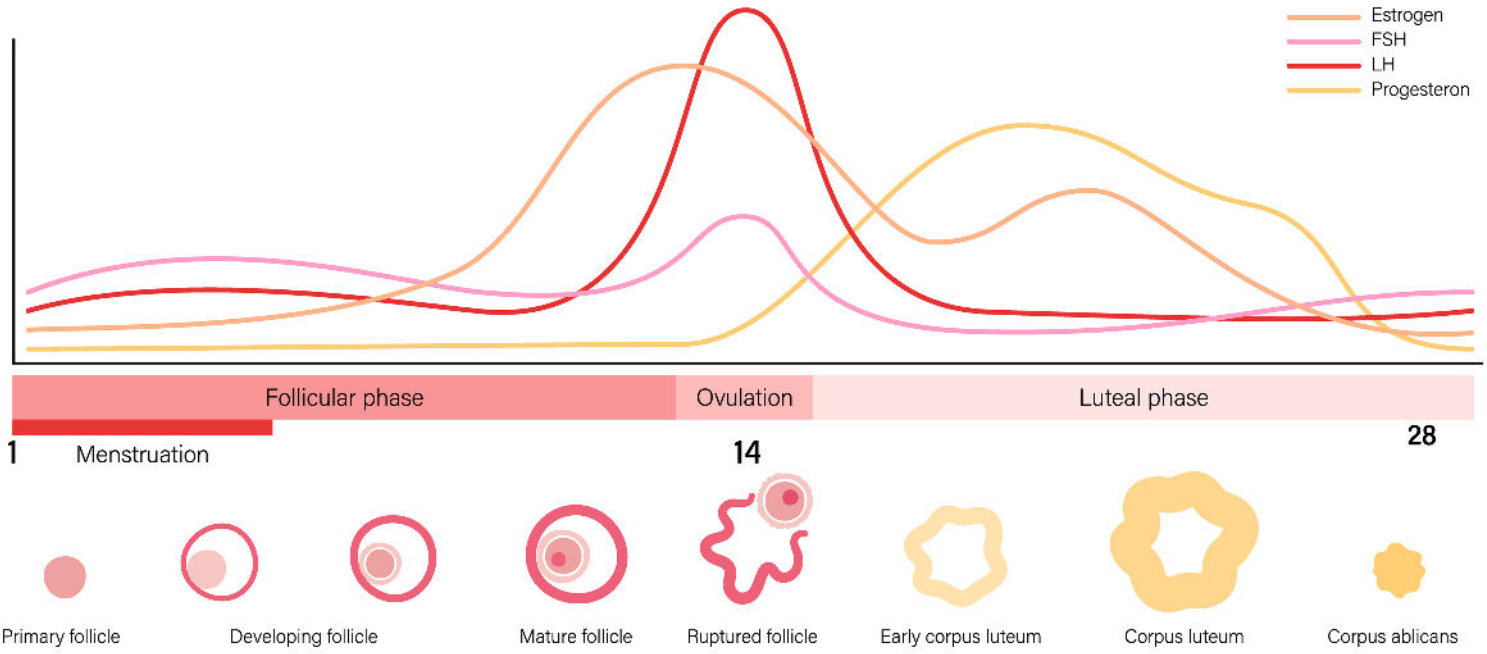
NATMED INTEGRATED MEDICINE

MENSTRUAL CYCLE CHARTING



YOUR MENSTRUAL CYCLE EXPLAINED

Charting your menstrual cycle is a great tool you can do at home that gives us key insights into your reproductive function.

A “normal” menstrual cycle takes up to 21-35 days (28 being the average). By charting your cycle we can gather important information regarding your hormones, and learn the optimal time for conception.

The “normal” menstrual cycle consists of several distinct phases, totalling approximately 28 days (yours may be shorter or longer). Each phase corresponds to physical changes that occur to “build up” and “break down” the uterus in preparation for pregnancy, with ovulation ideally occurring at the midpoint of the cycle.

These phases are associated with dramatic changes in the levels of certain hormones. The key players here are oestrogen, progesterone, lutenising hormone (LH) and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH).

Menstrual Phase (Days 1-5):

The shedding of uterine lining leading to the menstrual bleeding .

Follicular Phase (Days 5-14):

As bleeding ends, FSH and LH show small peaks above their normal low levels, leading to thickening of the uterine lining and maturing of oocyte (egg)-containing follicles in the ovary. At the same time, oestrogen (estradiol) is steadily rising.

Ovulation (Day 14):

A few days before ovulation, oestradiol peaks, after which point FSH and LH spike once more, triggering the release of a mature oocyte.

Conception:

After your egg is released, it is swept into one of your fallopian tubes, where it can be fertilised if sperm is present. The key is to time intercourse so that the egg meets the already waiting sperm. If this process is successful, you will be pregnant. If not (or no conception is attempted), you will move into the Luteal Phase.

Luteal Phase (days 14-28):

Levels of progesterone and oestradiol rise for the next two weeks, preparing the uterine lining for implantation of an embryo. If no implantation occurs, both hormone levels drop sharply, triggering menstruation.

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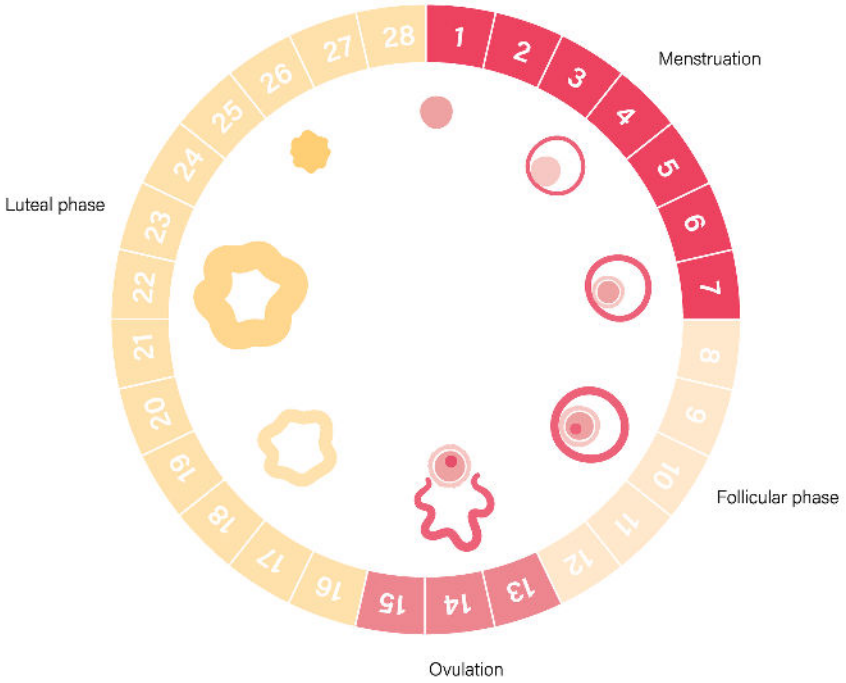


If fertilisation and implantation do occur, levels of progesterone and estradiol remain high throughout pregnancy, suppressing the spikes of FSH and LH that drive ovulation.

WHEN IS MY FERTILE WINDOW?

Your fertile window is approximately 6 days long. Sperm can exist in the female genital tract for 4-5 days, and eggs for 1-2 days. So a normal fertile window is from 5 days prior to ovulation to 1 day after ovulation.
Knowing your cycle and learning to interpret your ovulation signs gives us valuable information about when you are entering your fertile window
(or if, in fact, you are ovulating at all).

CHARTING YOUR CYCLE

There are 3 key signs we look for to indicate possible ovulation:

1. **A regular menstrual cycle**

2. **Fertile mucous**

3. **Body temperature rise (as discussed below)**

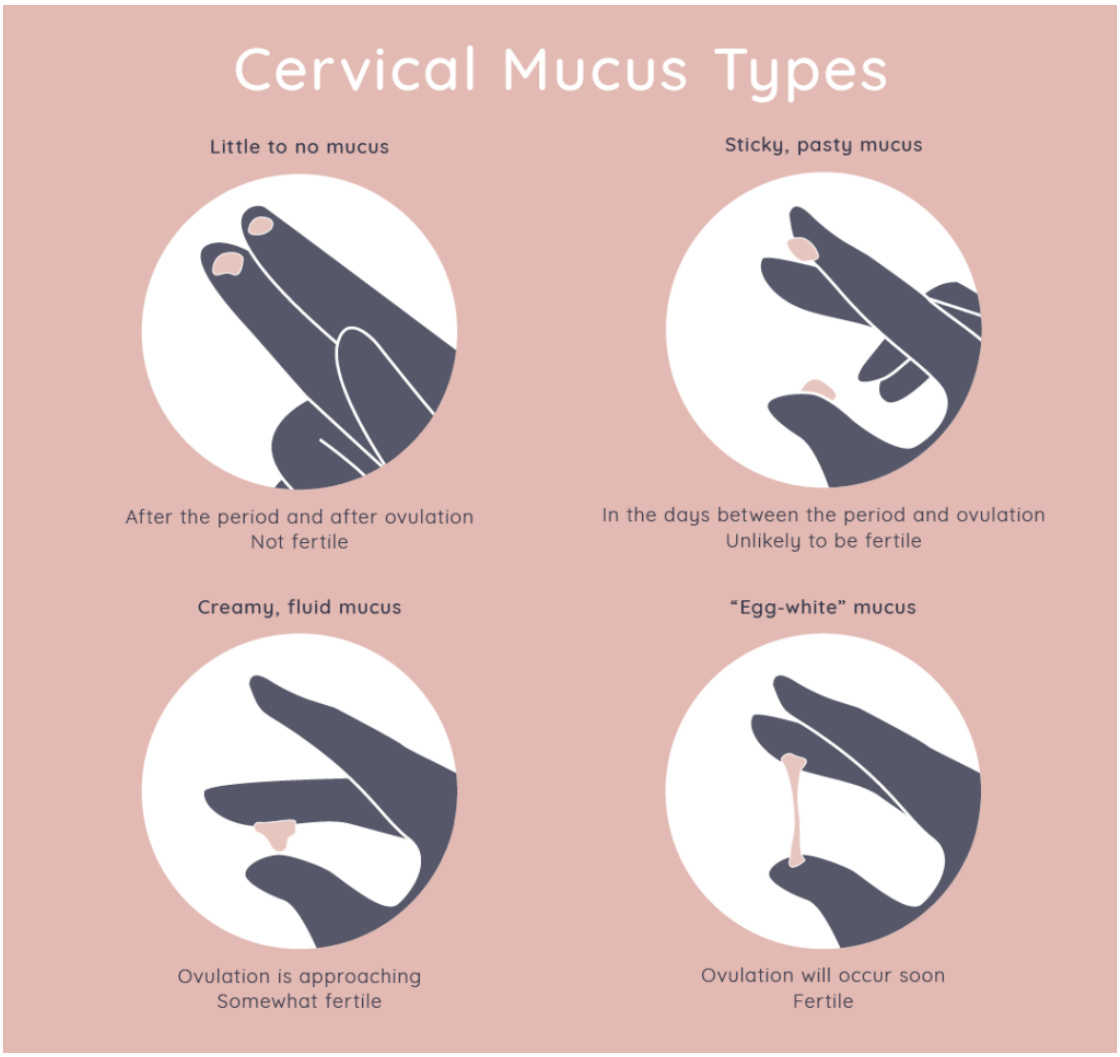
Urine ovulation sticks can also be a valuable tool in assessing ovulation. However as these can only indicate ovulation when it is occurring – if you rely on these and these alone, you might miss most of your fertile window (that valuable 5 days prior to ovulation).

Period tracking apps can also be helpful – however please don't rely on their fertility window predictions alone – this is just an algorithm and may not be reliable.

FERTILE MUCOUS

Your cervical mucous is an important fertility sign. When you are in your fertile window (i.e. prior to ovulation), your mucous will be clear, viscous and stretch between your fingers when you pull them apart (like raw egg white). Oestrogen stimulates this production, just before ovulation. Fertile mucus supports sperm to reach the uterus successfully, reaching the fallopian tubes.

Use the graphic below to help you interpret your mucous. As your cycle progresses, you will move from no cervical fluid through to sticky, to creamy, to egg white consistency.



BASAL BODY TEMPERATURE (BBT)

Basal body temperature is your body's temperature first thing in the morning, before you get out of bed. Before ovulation your temperature ranges from 36.1C - 36.5C. After ovulation it increases by approx. 0.3 C.

Cycle charting is less useful in timing intercourse for conception – because that temperature rise occurs AFTER ovulation (so the ideal time to conceive is BEFORE this rise). It is, however, a great tool to use to understand your menstrual cycle patterns, and confirm exactly when ovulation is occurring, or even if ovulation is occurring at all (if there is no temperature rise, you may not be ovulating). You may be asked to track your temperatures for a month or two so your practitioner can gather this vital information.

To record your BBT, use a basal body thermometer (available at chemists). Put it under your tongue first thing in the morning (before you get out of bed). Record your temperatures throughout the month using the provided chart.

CERVIX TEXTURE/POSITION

The final physical sign of ovulation is the softness and position of your cervix (the bottom part of your uterus where the opening is. Normally it is low about one finger length inside your vagina, and the texture is hard, just before ovulation it is higher and softer.

OVULATION TEST STRIPS

An LH surge is another sign of ovulation, and this can be detected with a urine strip. You need to start testing at least day 8 of your cycle. When you see a positive result, it usually means that you will ovulate within the next 36-40 hours. However be warned, most LH kits will miss approximately 20% of LH peaks. Plus, as mentioned earlier, they miss a key part of your fertile window. So while they can be a useful tool, they are best used in conjunction with other methods described above.

PERIOD TRACKING APPS

The best conception apps are Kindara & Fertility Friend.
Clue is also a great basic app for cycle tracking when you aren't actively trying to conceive. Fertility-specific apps will allow you to add data such as BBT and cervical mucus changes and see a graph which will give you a positive sign of when you ovulate. Yet relying on their predictions alone can be inaccurate for conception, so again please use them alongside the other methods above.