

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF

213-273

NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

Artificial vs. Natural

Nona Aguilar

Sympto-Thermal Methods

Josef Roetzer

The Effect of a Contraceptive Attitude

Wanda Poltawska

Population Policy

James T. McHugh

Volume IV, Number 3

Fall 1980

\$5.00 a copy

Sympto-Thermal Methods of Natural Family Planning

Josef Roetzer

SYMPPTO-THERMAL METHODS involve charting symptoms of the fertile time, as well as waking temperature, and allow couples to seek or avoid conception (conception regulation). Changes in cervical mucus secretion are the most important fertile-time symptoms. Since 1951 I have made evaluation of the temperature rise dependent on cessation of cervical mucus flow; my handbook (Roetzer 1965, 1979) and a later study (Roetzer 1968) presented the first authentic sympto-thermal methodology: "sympto-thermal" methods then current merely noted symptoms and interpreted the temperature independently of them.

The woman must learn to recognize at the vaginal entrance (vulva) the various forms of cervical mucus; she gradually develops a nuanced appreciation of the mucus symptom if she receives repeated instruction or herself studies a suitable handbook. With today's improved pedagogical techniques almost 100 percent of fertile women can successfully recognize both the increase in fertile-time cervical mucus secretion and its various forms ("more-fertile type" and "less-fertile type").

I consider only those elevated readings significant for defining infertility which lie after cessation of the form of cervical mucus secretion that indicates the woman's particularly fertile time. A very simple rule ("After cessation of this cervical mucus flow watch for 3 'higher' readings that are higher than

Josef Roetzer, M.D., former lecturer in pastoral medicine at the Universities of Innsbruck (Austria) and Regensburg (Germany) and at the Philosophical-Theological Universities of Linz and St. Poelten (Austria), is director of Marriage Advisory Service, Voecklabruck, Austria. This article will appear in *Nature's Way—God's Way: Natural Family Planning*, edited by Father Anthony Zimmerman, S.V.D.

the preceding 6 lower readings") identifies onset of a period of absolute infertility continuing into the beginning of the following cycle; the Pearl Index is "zero" (no pregnancies per 100 couples per year of use) (Roetzer 1977a, 1977b, 1978).

A combined approach is used to determine early-cycle infertility. The beginner may assume Days 1-6 infertile (Day 1 = the first day of "true menstruation"); the experienced woman may consider additional days infertile by attending to fine points of mucus observation or self-examination of the external cervical os. The probability of pregnancy from intercourse on or before Day 6 is less than 1 in 6,000—Pearl Index 0.2 (better than the Pill). Use of both pre- and postmenstrual infertile days by 491 women in 17,026 cycles (Roetzer 1977a, 1977b, 1978) yielded in practice an overall Pearl Index of 0.8 (as reliable as the Pill, but without its harmful and sometimes lethal side effects (*Lancet* 1977, Vessey et al. 1977).

Author's Note: These results were obtained from couples of differing socio-economic backgrounds, some of them with only primary-school education. In contrast with participants in some other studies, these couples were not canvassed by a researcher but came of their own accord to my advisory service to learn NFP. The motivation was already there. Perhaps the teaching method enhanced motivation. This factor will help explain why among these clients we have an unplanned-pregnancy rate of only 0.8 per 100 woman-years, whereas in some of the funded studies the rate may be as high as 20 or more. Another reason for differences in results among various studies of NFP is that even within what is called "the sympto-thermal method" there are in fact *several* approaches, of varying effectiveness. The principal differences concern the interpretation of the rise in temperature, and the determination of the postmenstrual infertile period.

References

- Lancet*. 1977. Mortality among women participating in the Oxford/Family Planning Association contraceptive study. Editorial. No. 2, pp. 731-33.
- Roetzer, J. 1965. *Kinderzahl und Liebesehe, Ein Leitfaden zur Regelung der Empfaengnis* [Family size and married love: A guide to conception regulation], 1st ed. Herder: Vienna-Freiburg-Basel. 9th ed., 1978. Italian version, *La regolazione delle nascite secondo natura*, Aldo Martello-Giunti, 1975. Now out of print in German (replaced by Roetzer 1979).
- . 1968. Erweiterte Basaltemperaturmessung und Empfaengnisregelung. *Archiv fuer Gynaekologie* 206:195-214. English version: Supplemented BBT and regulation of conception, *Int. Rev. NFP* 4:1-18 (spring 1980).
- . 1977a. *Fine points of the sympto-thermic method of natural family planning*, nos. 1 and 2. Collegeville, Minn.: Human Life Center.
- . 1977b. Further evolution of the sympto-thermal methods. *Int. Rev. NFP* 1:139-50.
- . 1978. The sympto-thermal method: Ten years of change. *Linacre Quarterly* 45:358-74.
- . 1979. *Natuerliche Geburtenregelung, Der partnerschaftliche Weg*. Herder: Vienna-

JOSEF ROETZER

Freiburg-Basel. Japanese version, Tokyo, 1979; English manuscript (*Natural birth control: Partnership in family planning*) recently completed; Dutch and Spanish versions in preparation.

Vessey, M. P., et al. 1977. Mortality among oral-contraceptive users: Royal College of General Practitioners. *Lancet*, no. 2, pp. 727-31.

Editorial Communications

Submission of Contributions

THREE COPIES of the manuscript should be sent to the Editor along with a short biographical sketch of the author/contributor. The manuscript should be neatly typed (without handwritten corrections) on one side of the paper, double-spaced (footnotes and references too) and liberally margined. Authors should indicate on the manuscript the desired order and position of data in a table format which is separately submitted from the body of the article. All mathematical data in horizontal and/or vertical columns should be appropriately titled and checked for summational accuracy. At the end of the article, references should be listed alphabetically, showing author, name of periodical, volume number, pages (initial and last) and year of publication.

The Copyright Act of 1976 became effective on January 1, 1978. Therefore, all manuscripts must be accompanied by the following written statement, signed by one author: "The undersigned author transfers all copyright ownership of the manuscript (title of article) to the publisher, Paul Marx, Ph.D., O.S.B., in the event the work is published. The undersigned author warrants that the article is original, is not under consideration by another journal, and has not been previously published. I sign for and accept responsibility for releasing this material on behalf of any and all co-authors."

Editor: Virginia D. Gager
c/o Human Life Center
Saint John's University
Collegeville, MN 56321