

## **Fertility Awareness, Basal Body Temperature (BBT), and identifying cervical fluid**

**By Jo George**

A lot of women are still not aware of the precise working of their cycles. One survey carried out in the UK in 1993 revealed that a third of women believed ovulation occurred during their period and 21 believed that they were fertile for more than 21 days when in actual fact the figure is more like 5-7. But surely things have changed? You would think so, but a recent American study revealed that attitudes have not really changed a lot.

It's essential for women to know how to identify ovulation in order to time intercourse effectively. To begin with a woman's cycle can vary a lot from between 24 to 36 days which makes pinpointing ovulation challenging. Predictor kits that show colour changes before ovulation can be misleading and some women can experience colour changes all month long. Many women assume that they ovulate at mid cycle – 14 days, however ovulation can occur on days 8, 17, and even 21 therefore many women may be having intercourse at the wrong times of the month.

A digital thermometer is best and takes only one minute to give a reading. A woman's pre ovulatory waking temp ranges from 97 to 97.5 F. Post ovulation, it rises to 97.6 to 98.6, indicating that ovulation has already occurred. It then stays raised until her next period between 11 to 16 days. The BBT chart in normal conditions typically shows a biphasic curve i.e. a curve with two distinct phases. The first spans the period before the fall in temperature that precedes ovulation, and the second phase begins immediately after ovulation with a sharp rise in temperature, which stays high for at least 11 days. The key to successfully examining the charts is not to watch the overall temperature peaks but to see a definite overall thermal peak in the cycle as a whole. It's useful to remember however that waking temperature can be affected by fever, medication or drinking alcohol the night before.

As well as optimising the timing of intercourse charting the basal body temperature (BBT) daily gives the Chinese medicine practitioner an immense amount of information regarding where the imbalance may be occurring. A monophasic (without clear distinction between two phases) with irregular and relatively low temperatures (around 97 degrees Fahrenheit) together with cold signs and symptoms may indicate kidney yang deficiency. In western scientific terms progesterone production may be inadequate. From the Chinese medicine perspective if we tonify and warm kidney yang this aids to regulate this phase of the cycle and maintain temperature balance. Conversely a monophasic (i.e. without a clear distinction between two phases) pattern of high temperatures accompanied by heat signs responds well to herbs that tonify the yin and cool heat.

An erratic or see saw pattern of temperatures means there is not enough hormonal regulation during the cycle to normalize the temperatures. This is most often caused a pattern known as liver qi stagnation in Chinese medicine, a pattern, which can occur from an individual's mal adaptation to stress and/or inadequate or no support base in place (see article on stress and fertility). Liver qi stagnation often arises in women who exhibit no pattern at all to the timing of their menstruation i.e. one month the length is 35 days, and the next 26 days, together with premenstrual signs some months, but not others. Stress affects the endocrine system (hormonal system) immensely and every step should be taken to rectify the situation; herbs can be

formulated to relax the liver qi, however lifestyle changes must be changed in order to cope with perceived stress.

Although a useful indicator of ovulation body temperature is not a good predictor of fertility until its too late that is. This is because by the time the temperature goes up the egg is usually dead and gone. Therefore it is very important to know what your cervical fluid looks like, as it is crucial for timing intercourse along with pinpointing ovulation.

Women are only fertile when they produce fertile cervical fluid in the few days around ovulation. This cervical fluid has its own cycle; directly after the period it tends to be non existent or slight, then it becomes sticky or rubbery, then creamy and lotion like, until it reaches the most fertile consistency around ovulation which is very wet, like raw egg white, non soluble and stretchy from 1 to 10 in. Within a day or two of ovulation it dries up abruptly. The greatest amount of fluid may occur one or two days before a woman's peak fertility day- either one or two days before ovulation or on the day.

With the help of a Chinese medicine practitioner to assess your lifestyle and habits together with these simple Fertility Awareness Methods couples can really say that they've done everything they can for themselves before embarking on IVF treatment. Unfortunately there are no obvious advantages to be made by drugs companies in sharing this kind of knowledge, and it is a fact that many women will take drugs throughout most of their reproductive lives. But at the same time there is no public funding available to educate people. Instead couples contemplate IVF treatment only one year after trying to conceive, and without having tried the useful approaches of both Chinese medicine and the Fertility Awareness Method.

BBT charts and temperature kits are available from major chemists, or download an easy to use fertility tracking software from The Fertility Awareness website [www.TCOYF.com](http://www.TCOYF.com)

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