

Long-term effectiveness of new family planning method shown in study

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To help women who follow the Standard Days Method of family planning to know on which days pregnancy is likely or unlikely, the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University Medical Center developed CycleBeads, a string of 32 color-coded beads with each bead representing a day of the menstrual cycle. Credit: Institute for Reproductive Health, Georgetown University Medical Center

A simple-to-use, fertility-awareness based method of family planning developed by researchers from the Institute for Reproductive Health at Georgetown University Medical Center so effectively meets the needs of users that they continue to rely on it for years.

A new study finds that [women](#) who follow the Standard Days Method®, are likely to continue using the method and to use it effectively. Results of the large, multi-country study of 1659 women appear in the October

2011 issue of the *Journal of Family Planning & [Reproductive Health Care](#)*.

The Standard Days Method identifies the 12-day "fertile window" of a woman's menstrual cycle. These 12 days take into account the life span of the woman's egg (about 24 hours) and the viable life of sperm (about five days) as well as the variation in the actual timing of ovulation from one cycle to the next. The new study examines the long-term use of the Standard Days Method, following the participants for three years.

"Many women desire a way to plan their family that doesn't involve medications or devices that might affect their health," says Institute for Reproductive Health Director Victoria Jennings, Ph.D., professor of obstetrics and gynecology at Georgetown University Medical Center. "They most often do this for personal preferences, though some are attracted to these methods for religious or cultural reasons. The family planning methods we at Georgetown have developed meet a growing need for sustainable, accessible, high-quality fertility awareness methods of family planning. This new study shows that women will continue to use a method that works for them while meeting their needs and preferences." Jennings is not an author of the new study.

The Standard Days Method was established as an effective short-term (one year) family planning method in a study published in 2002. In this earlier study, of which Jennings was the principal investigator, the Standard Days Method was found to be more than 95 percent effective at avoiding pregnancy, with a failure rate of less than 5 percent. This effectiveness rate is higher than other use-directed methods such as diaphragm or condom.

James N. Gribble, Sc.D. of the Population Reference Bureau and senior author of the 2011 paper, says their results demonstrate that effectiveness continues throughout the second and third years of use.

"Family planning enables women to have the desired number of children and to space and time births. Almost all the 2011 study participants had children, often with at least one child younger than two years old, before they began to use the Standard Days Method," he says. "Yet few of the study participants had unplanned pregnancy over the three-year period of the study due to the method's very high effectiveness."

To help women who follow the Standard Days Method to know on which days pregnancy is likely or unlikely, the Institute for Reproductive Health developed CycleBeads®, a string of 32 color-coded beads with each bead representing a day of the menstrual cycle. Beginning with the red bead, which represents the first day of her menstrual period, the woman moves a small rubber ring one bead each day. The brown beads are the days when pregnancy is very unlikely, and the glow-in-the dark white beads (beads 8-19) represent her fertile days.

The women who participated in the original 2002 study relied on CycleBeads to track their cycles. Many had not previously used any [family planning](#) method. They continued to use CycleBeads for up to two additional years in the study published in 2011.

Provided by Georgetown University Medical Center

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