

COPING WITH ABSTINENCE

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PERIODIC ABSTINENCE

All natural methods of family planning require periods of abstinence from genital intercourse and genital contact for couples who are avoiding pregnancy. Periodic abstinence also occurs naturally throughout a couple's life, such as, during illness, business trips or mood swings. Couples often feel challenged by the experience of having to abstain from genital activity and also feel there can be a lack of spontaneity in their sexual life. However, although couples who use natural methods to avoid pregnancy have to periodically abstain from genital activity, they never have to abstain from a holistic sexuality. Most of human sexuality occurs from the giving and receiving as males and females from the mind and heart. A holistic sexual expression includes spiritual, physical, intellectual, communicative and the emotional dimensions, i.e., SPICE!

BENEFITS OF ABSTINENCE

Far from harming a marital relationship, periodic abstinence actually engenders upon couples a number of benefits including:

- Self-control
- Selflessness
- Respect of partner
- Favor attention to partner
- Role model for children
- Sexual satisfaction

Many couples experience what they call the "honey moon" effect, in that sexual expression remains new and exciting when they practice periodic abstinence. Furthermore, planned sexual encounters often bring more satisfaction than uncontrolled "in the heat of passion" responses.

SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

Periodic abstinence can also engender spiritual benefits. The time of abstinence can be a quiet time without sexual tension (expectations). A quiet time to listen to each other and to God. A Holy time in which to decide whether to create new sons and daughters (new images of God).

COPING WITH PERIODIC ABSTINENCE (PA)

Experienced couple users of NFP best cope with PA by planning ahead for the fertile time. Users of NFP learn to follow the patterns of their cycles and are able to interpret and predict the rhythms of their fertile and infertile times. Couples who best cope with PA during the fertile time plan ahead to express their sexuality in a non-genital fashion. Couples who use and teach the Creighton Model of NFP call this the practice of SPICE. Examples of non-genital behaviors of SPICE are as follows:

- ◆ **SPIRITUAL** - praying together
- ◆ **PHYSICAL** - hugging/holding hands
- ◆ **Intellectual** - reading together
- ◆ **COMMUNICATIVE** - discussing children
- ◆ **EMOTIONAL** - sharing feelings

For further ideas on how to cope with periodic abstinence and/or ideas about the practice of SPICE, make an appointment with your certified Natural Family Planning teacher. See instrument below to help assess you or your couple/clients spice index!

BRIEF SPICE QUESTIONNAIRE

Respond to each of the following 10 SPICE behaviors by circling either:

- 1 = never
- 2 = rarely (seasonally)
- 3 = sometime (monthly)
- 4 = often (weekly)
- 5 = all the time (daily)

and then sum the responses. (The couple can either respond together or separately)

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|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. We pray together: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Attend church together: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Kiss/Hug/hold hands: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Enjoy intercourse: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Share books, art, music: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Encourage intellectual pursuits: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Share goals/values/dreams: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Talk about achieving/avoiding pregnancy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Share feelings: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Express love for each other: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

TOTAL SCORE _____

Interpretation of score: Just as too much or too little spice in food can spoil the meal, so too in a relationship!

- 10-15 = Get Help
- 16-25 = Bland
- 26-35 = Needs a tad more
- 36-45 = About right
- > 45 = Back off a bit