

The Persona contraceptive ^[1]

Dear Alice,

In Europe, Unilever sells a product called "Persona," a Symptothermal Method temperature to record the woman's cycle. Does such a product exist in the U.S.A.? If so, who and where?

Thank you, KT

Answer

Dear KT,

Condoms, patches, pills, and...computers? You got it! Persona is a Natural Family Planning (NFP) device that allows women to control their fertility without the use of hormones or barrier methods. The Persona computer program allows a woman to accurately monitor the fertile and infertile phases of her menstrual cycle by measuring her urinary metabolites of reproductive hormones. Persona is a high-tech calendar method — that is, it goes beyond traditional symptothermal methods ^[2] of family planning by aligning measurements of bodily signals with a computer algorithm.

Persona is a hand held monitor that measures the level of hormones in a woman's urine to help determine if she is ovulating. Eight times during each month, women using Persona pee into a cup and then dip test strips into their urine. These test strips are fed into the monitor. A green light displayed on the device means a woman is not fertile; a red light indicates that a woman is at or near ovulation. During the days that a woman is most likely to conceive, she should abstain from intercourse or use contraception if she does not want to get pregnant, or choose to have unprotected intercourse if she wants to have a baby. When used as a contraceptive, Persona has a 94 percent reliability rate if used as directed and as the only method of birth control.

Persona is widely used in England and elsewhere in Europe. Because the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not evaluated its use as a medical device, Persona is not sold in the United States. However, it can be purchased legally online for about \$250 and shipped to the U.S. Couples in the United States looking for similar NFP technology have a few options:

Lady-Comp ^[3] uses a combination of the temperature method and calendar method for planning

and preventing pregnancy. The computer uses this data to predict when a woman is fertile and infertile during her menstrual cycle. According to a clinical trial, after about one year of use, the probability of an unintended pregnancy was 5.3% after one year of use, 6.8% after 2 years of use, and 8.2% after 3 years of use.

The [Clearblue Easy Fertility Monitor](#) ^[4] (CEFM) is available in the United States and Canada. This device was designed for couples looking to become pregnant. The algorithm for the monitor tells when your most fertile days are, and was not designed to help prevent pregnancy. In fact, studies done to determine the monitor's contraceptive success (using it to avoid pregnancy) found that CEFM is less effective when used without any other method of contraception.

Remember, technology has its limitations — these NFP devices only work as well as you adhere to their recommendations. A red light on the monitor means STOP — no unprotected intercourse, no matter what. In practice, reliability rates have been lower because couples need to abstain completely from intercourse or have intercourse with contraception when ovulation is near (about six to ten days of each month). If you do not think you could be abstinent or limit yourself to protected sex during your "red light" times, perhaps another birth control method would work better for you.

Alice!

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