

## NFP Charts Provide Information about Potential or Real Health Problems

### Marilyn Shannon on the NFP-Nutrition Connection

“Frustrating beyond belief!” That’s how many women feel about their cycles. They confess to feeling out of control, and readily purchase pills, ovulation predictor kits, and pregnancy tests to help them feel better and know what’s going on inside. But a real understanding of our body and true help isn’t something we can purchase over-the-counter. It is however, something we can gain through the charting involved in Natural Family Planning. Marilyn Shannon, an expert on the NFP-Nutrition Connection has helped many women overcome infertility, cycle irregularities and repeated miscarriages through better nutrition. What’s more she has shown how *charting can help provide women with information about potential or real health problems*. Following are a few highlights gleaned from her popular book, Fertility Cycles and Nutrition and columns she’s authored.

**Thyroid Function and the Chart** Low thyroid function, which often goes undetected in women, will cause several problems that can be seen on the NFP chart: 1) Low basal temperature, 2) prolonged or constant less fertile mucus, 3) delayed or absent ovulation, 4) anovulatory cycles, 5) heavy menstrual bleeding, and 6) infertility. Physical symptoms include fatigue, weight gain, anxiety or depression, dry or itchy skin, poor concentration, cold intolerance, and headaches. If a woman is troubled by some of the symptoms listed above and has noticed that her basal temperatures are on the low side, she might consider adding adequate amounts of iodine, the B vitamins and vitamins C and E, vitamin A, zinc and selenium to her diet. Essential fatty acids found in flax oil and safflower oil or other salad oil stimulates all glands. Women frequently report that their basal temperatures gradually rise to normal when they these and other self-help suggestions on low thyroid function in *Fertility, Cycles and Nutrition*.

**Short Luteal Phase on the Chart** This term refers to charts that show elevated post-ovulatory temperatures lasting less than 11 or 12 days. Spotting while the temperatures are still high and a brown discharge after the heavier days of menses have passed often occur with a short luteal phase. The combination contributes to prolonged, though not necessarily heavy, periods. For couples avoiding a pregnancy, short luteal phase cycles may require more abstinence than the usual. For couples seeking a pregnancy, fertility may be decreased, or when conception does occur, an early miscarriage without development of the child may follow. The vitamin Optivite can help to improve the hormonal levels that contribute to short luteal phase. It contains most of the nutrients needed for healing and proper blood clotting, except for the essential fatty acids that can be obtained in flax oil.

**PMS and the Chart** PMS refers to a large group of symptoms which may occur in women during the post-ovulatory phase of their cycle, though severe PMS may begin earlier and last into the next cycle. Symptoms are often characterized by nervous tension, mood swings, irritability, anxiety, weight gain, swelling, breast tenderness, abdominal bloating, headaches, craving for sweets, increased appetite, fatigue, depression,

confusion, and/or insomnia. The good news is that in no other reproductive disorder have the nutritional guidelines to improve the condition been so well worked out. Once the cause is established, a woman can begin to make some nutritional changes that will reduce her symptoms. For example, many women with PMS have elevated estrogen levels and low progesterone levels in the luteal phase of their cycles. A combination of vitamin B6 which has been shown to elevate progesterone and dietary fiber from whole plant foods which has the beneficial effect of reducing estrogen levels may work together to solve the problem. Several different causes, all of which relate to dietary and micronutrient imbalances, have been proposed and explained in *Fertility Cycles and Nutrition*.

(Sources: *Fertility, Cycles, and Nutrition* by Marilyn Shannon, “What Your Basal Temps Reveal About Thyroid Function,” “Shorter and Lighter Periods,” and “Check Diet if Short Luteal Phase is Causing Problems” by Marilyn Shannon.)

#### Sidebar: Who is Marilyn Shannon?

Marilyn Shannon, author of *Fertility, Cycles and Nutrition*, and columnist for the Couple to Couple League’s magazine, *Family Foundations* has spent much time exploring the relationship between nutrition and heavy bleeding, poor mucus problems, delayed ovulation, and other cycle problems. Shannon holds a masters degree in human physiology with a minor in biochemistry from Indiana University's Medical Sciences Program. She is a part time, tenured instructor of human anatomy and physiology at Indiana University- Purdue University at Fort Wayne, Indiana.

She and her husband Ron are the parents of eight children, ages 3-24.