

# 4

## Spacing Pregnancies

### INTRODUCTION

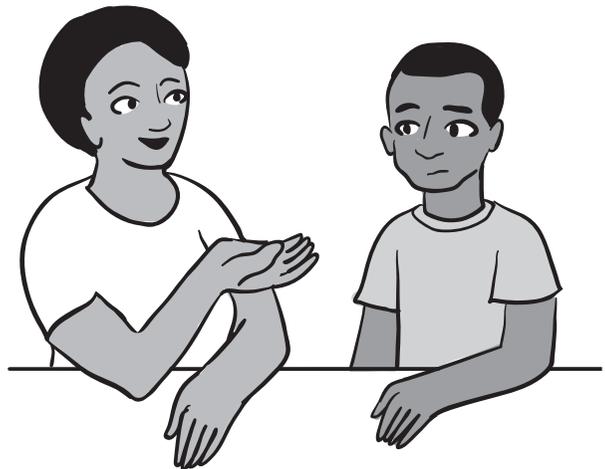
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Before planning to get pregnant again, couples need to consider the number of children they already have, the impact another child would have on the well-being of their family, and the age of the mother. Couples need to think about how another child would affect the health of all family members, how well the couple can earn and save money, and how each child will be cared for, provided for, and educated. If the couple still wants to have another child, they need to consider the healthiest time for the pregnancy.

It is best for the health and survival of the woman and the child to wait at least 2 years after giving birth before trying to become pregnant again. This message should be shared widely by health care providers, counselors, parents, and other leaders in the community. Using a modern family planning method will make it easier for couples to space their children.

Immediately following childbirth, women can avoid another pregnancy for up to 6 months if they breastfeed only and have not resumed their monthly bleeding. “Breastfeeding only” means giving the baby breast milk and no other liquids or foods, except for vitamins, medicines and vaccines. Feeding a baby

*(Continued on page 32)*



- 1** A woman should wait 2 years after giving birth before she tries to become pregnant again — by waiting, the mother and her children will be healthier.
- 2** After delivery, women can achieve protection from pregnancy by breastfeeding only — until their baby reaches 6 months of age OR until their monthly bleeding returns, whichever happens first.
- 3** If not feeding a baby only breast milk, a woman is at risk of pregnancy as early as 4 weeks after giving birth. To space or prevent the next pregnancy, the couple must start using a modern contraceptive method.
- 4** During pregnancy a woman and her partner can decide what family planning method to use after the baby is born in order to space or prevent the next pregnancy.

only breast milk provides short-term protection from pregnancy and contributes to infant and child health and survival. Health care providers at all levels should encourage and promote giving a baby only breast milk.

After the pregnancy protection due to breastfeeding ends, women and their partners need to decide on another effective contraceptive method to use. A family planning counselor can provide accurate information about modern family planning methods that can be used after delivery and can help a couple decide what method suits them. Women can choose from many reversible contraceptive methods to delay their next pregnancy. If a woman has had all the children she and her partner/husband want and has completed her family, she or her partner may choose a permanent, non-reversible family planning method. See Chapter 7 for more information on male and female sterilization.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### FACT 1.

**A woman should wait 2 years after giving birth before she tries to become pregnant again — by waiting, the mother and her children will be healthier.**

If a couple waits at least 2 years after the birth of a child before trying to become pregnant again, both the woman and her children will be healthier. The mother can breastfeed her older child longer and give the child the ability to grow stronger and better fight disease before a younger brother or sister is born. The next baby will be less likely to be underweight at birth, less likely to become sick as a baby, will have a healthier childhood, and, overall, will be more likely to survive. Waiting for at least 2 years also allows time for the woman to recover from childbirth, regain her strength, and become adequately nourished between pregnancies.

### FACT 2.

**After delivery, women can achieve protection from pregnancy by breastfeeding only — until their baby reaches 6 months of age OR until their monthly bleeding returns, whichever happens first.**



After a woman gives birth, she can avoid another pregnancy for up to 6 months if she has no monthly bleeding and feeds her baby only breast milk. No other foods or liquids should be given, except for vitamins, medicines, and vaccines. The use of breastfeeding only is a short-term family planning method and referred to as the Lactational Amenorrhea Method, or LAM.

LAM will effectively prevent pregnancy for no more than 6 months. If her monthly bleeding returns, the protection from pregnancy will end sooner, and the women will need another family planning method. Similarly, if the mother starts giving her baby any other liquids or foods and reduces breastfeeding before the baby reaches 6 months old, she must start another family planning method. A couple might want to keep a method such as pills or condoms available at home so they can start it as soon as one of the LAM criteria expires.

Giving the baby only breast milk may be difficult for some mothers in places where it is common practice to give babies other food or liquids at an early age, or where work schedules make exclusive breastfeeding difficult. In these situations women may want to start another family planning method soon after delivery in order to space their pregnancies.

A woman may be protected from pregnancy if ALL of these three conditions are present at the same time:

1. The woman breastfeeds only.
2. Her monthly bleeding has not returned.
3. The baby is less than 6 months old.

### **FACT 3.**

**If not feeding a baby only breast milk, a woman is at risk of pregnancy as early as 4 weeks after giving birth. To space or prevent the next pregnancy, the couple must start using a modern contraceptive method.**

To space pregnancies for the healthiest outcomes, women who do not feed their baby only breast milk should choose another family planning method and start it no later than 4 weeks after giving birth. These women are at risk of pregnancy as soon as 4 weeks after having a baby, even before their monthly bleeding returns. Most women who are not breastfeeding can start

any contraceptive method immediately after giving birth. Women who are partially breastfeeding ideally should be guided to choose a method that does not interfere with breastfeeding. See Chapter 7 for information on contraceptive methods.

**FACT 4.**

**During pregnancy a woman and her partner can decide what family planning method to use after the baby is born in order to space or prevent the next pregnancy.**

Ideally, a pregnant woman (and her partner) would discuss family planning with a health care provider before she gives birth. This discussion would help the couple be prepared to begin a family planning method at the appropriate time after delivery in order to space the next pregnancy or prevent an unplanned pregnancy.

Pregnancy is a time when many women come in contact with health care providers. This contact offers an opportunity to discuss and choose a family planning method. This counseling before the baby is born is particularly important to give women the opportunity to choose a method that can be provided at delivery, such as immediate post-delivery insertion of an intrauterine device or female sterilization. For such methods, all counseling and decision-making should take place before the start of labor, not on the delivery table.

During a woman's pregnancy is an ideal time for her partner to have a vasectomy, if the couple does not want any more children and chooses that method. Vasectomy takes 3 months to become effective. A man can schedule his vasectomy so that it will be effective by the time his partner delivers a baby and needs protection from pregnancy again.