

Women's knowledge regarding ovulation and most likely time of conception

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Introduction

Education regarding conception tends to be tailored to either pregnancy prevention, or in the case of students studying biology, the basics of the menstrual cycle. When it comes to planning a family, gaps in women's knowledge regarding the best time to conceive and when they are ovulating may result in it taking longer to conceive than expected.

The best days to time intercourse in order to become pregnant are the 2 days before ovulation and the day of ovulation itself¹ and women who are knowledgeable about their fertile period tend to achieve pregnancy more quickly². Cumulative pregnancy rates in women with fertility focused intercourse can be very high, for example, 76% in first cycle and 90% after 3 cycles.³ This study presents data on women's awareness of their fertile days and menstrual cycle.

Methods

A survey was conducted by GfK NOP, a leading market research and consumer insight agency, with women aged 18 to 45 to examine how knowledgeable they were about their menstrual cycle. Telephone interviews were carried out with a sample of 463 women in the US during November 2005. Responses were weighted by demographic factors including age, geographic region and race. The main topics examined were:

- Their awareness of the best days to conceive a baby during the cycle
- The extent to which they are confident in knowing the time when they are ovulating during a cycle
- The regularity of their menstrual cycle
- Awareness of their cycle length
- Awareness of products available that can predict when a woman ovulates
- Their opinion as to the age that a significant decline in their ability to conceive occurs.

Results

The demographics of the study population are shown in table 1:

Marital status:	
Single	34%
Married	55%
Separated/widowed/divorced	11%
Presence of children at home:	
Have children at home	68%
Under 6 years	30%
6 to 11 years	27%
12 to 17 years	36%
Education:	
High school or less	44%
Some college	29%
College graduate or more	25%
Employment:	
Full-time	50%
Part-time	16%
Not employed	34%
Region:	
North East	19%
North Central	20%
South	37%
West	24%

Table One

When asked which part of the menstrual cycle is the best time for intercourse to achieve pregnancy, 15% of women did not know and 9% thought that conception was possible at any time. The optimum time was only identified by around 1 in 2 women, with 25% of women suggesting 1 or 2 days before ovulation, and a further 22% suggested the day of ovulation itself as the best time for trying to conceive. Interestingly 28% stated it was 1-2 days after ovulation when the fertile window would have closed (figure 1).



Figure One

Women's confidence in knowing when they ovulated was equally spread between those who had a degree of confidence (44%, split into; very confident, 16% and; somewhat confident, 28%), and those who had little confidence (44%, split into; not too confident, 18% and; not confident at all, 26%), with 12% of women not knowing at all (figure 2).

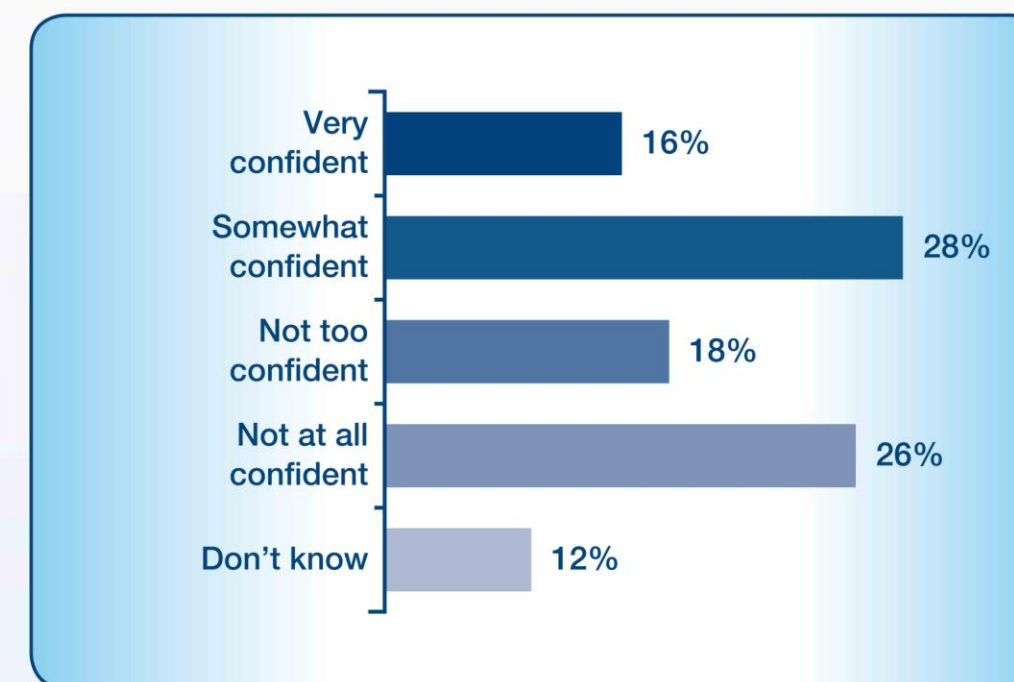


Figure Two

When asking about menstrual cycle length, 67% of women thought they knew their cycle length. Nearly half of the women thought their cycles were very regular (47%), and 19% thought they were somewhat regular, 9% somewhat irregular, 15% very irregular and 7% did not know.

Two thirds of women (66%) were aware that products were available which can predict when a woman ovulates, with 17% stating they were not aware of any products that could do this, and 17% not knowing whether they were available or not.

On average women believed that the age when there is a significant decline in a woman's ability to conceive a baby is 38 years. Nearly one in four women (22%) said they did not know.

Conclusion

Just 1 in 2 women are aware of the best time in the menstrual cycle to achieve pregnancy, with many women suggesting times with low probabilities of pregnancy (post-ovulation). It is interesting that a number of women think that it is possible to become pregnant throughout the entire menstrual cycle. This may be a legacy of pill use, where having to take daily pills may suggest each day is potentially fertile. The age at which women thought fertility declined was relatively old and this misconception could lead to women leaving it too late to conceive. These findings suggest a need for provision of good quality information from credible sources regarding fertility, tailored towards understanding how to conceive. Having an appreciation of the timing of the fertile period is important if timing of intercourse is attempted in order to conceive. Indeed, mistiming of intercourse is a primary cause for failure to conceive.⁴

Many women were also not confident in knowing when they ovulated, and only two thirds believed they knew their menstrual cycle length. This suggests that for many women cycle and fertility awareness is poor, which may result in conception taking longer than expected when trying to become pregnant. There was reasonable awareness that products exist to predict ovulation, so when they try to conceive, these women may choose to use such products to maximise their chances of conception.

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