

Checking your cervical fluid

Even though cervical fluid is the most important piece of using the sympto-thermal method (STM), many people do not focus on it. Why? Confusion! Every woman is different in regards to how her fluid looks, how much she has, and how long she has it for. Even though it's an extremely reliable sign, for most women it is difficult to just learn and not think about again because it is truly experience and an understanding of your own body that will teach you when you are fertile. Temperature often helps women when they are first learning the STM because they can see their jump and learn what cervical fluid was just like for them right around the time of ovulation. That all being said, let's talk about a good base for checking your cervical fluid and interpreting it.

When and how often should you check your cervical fluid

When I talk about checking your cervical fluid, I am just talking about noticing anything being there. This doesn't take a huge dent out of your life (at least not once you get more experience). An easy practice is to check your cervical fluid each time you go to the bathroom. You already have your pants down and have the focus on your pelvis. In addition, with the way the female anatomy is, you are more likely to notice cervical fluid after using the bathroom. Your vagina is right in between our urethra and colon, and it can be like squeezing a tube of toothpaste and getting that cervical fluid right to your vaginal opening. During the time you are expecting a point of change (or when you are new to the practice) it is a good idea to check before and after using the bathroom. Some women may find they need to do this all of the time, while some women may find after only is fine.

How to check your cervical fluid

The best way to collect your cervical fluid is to use a piece of toilet paper, folded so that your cervical fluid isn't lost in any crinkles. The reason I recommend toilet paper is because, as the vagina is a mucous membrane that is always damp, many women actually have a tendency to think they have more cervical fluid than they actually do. Using the toilet paper will ensure that *if you can test anything off of the toilet paper with your fingers* you are starting your fertile wave and *should not consider unprotected intercourse safe*. You should also pay attention to the sensation when you are wiping. As I am sure you know, this can be on a continuum from quite dry and uncomfortable to super slippery and necessitating multiple wipes. This is also a great thing to note on your charts.

If you can't seem to find your cervical fluid, you may either be producing little to none, or you may just have a hard time finding it. A good way to find cervical fluid, if you can't seem to, is using an internal check. To do this, squat, bear down, insert two fingers into your vagina and use the scissoring motion as much as possible with them, either very close to the cervix or using your fingers to squeeze the cervix a bit (your cervix will have a different texture than the rest of your vagina, very smooth and either hard like your nose when infertile or soft like your chin or cheek when fertile). Remove your fingers. There will always be SOMETHING on them due to being inside of your vagina (again, a mucous membrane). If this is thin and/or dissolves very easily and/or is water soluble (you can test this with water while you are beginning) it is not cervical fluid but natural vaginal secretions that you will have all month long. As you do with the toilet paper, take a sample of what you have found with your other hand. This will help you to discern the actual cervical fluid from any normal secretions, as well. Pull your fingers apart. Do

you notice anything stretching in between them? Notice amount, color, what it feels like, whether it may stretch or form peaks and note it on your chart.

The last thing you want to notice is your vaginal sensation throughout the day. This is generally tough at first, but ends up being as easy as knowing whether you have a runny nose. Do take into account that we also have sweat glands all around our vulva, so if you are working out or running around that isn't the time to notice a feeling of wetness. In addition, this may be easiest for you if you spend some time underwear free or in looser pants/a skirt.

Some ways to describe your cervical fluid

Like I said, it's an individual process and you have to find the words that work for you. But here is a (lengthy) list of what some women use to describe their cervical fluid.

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| boogers | rubbery |
| milky | bouncy |
| stretchy | wet |
| opaque | eggwhite |
| clear | snotty |
| yellow | watery |
| lotiony | thin |
| white | crumbly |
| thick | lube |
| sticky | slippery |
| streaked | pasty |
| gummy | spotting |
| goopy | cloudy |
| strong | creamy |
| shiny | sperm superhighway |
| stringy | dry |

As with all charting processes, when you just do it consistently you will find your pattern and find that it isn't that hard, after all. You will also be amazed by what your body does!