

Aches & Claims / By Loretta Chao

A Watch Set to Fertility Time

SOME women find that home fertility testing kits can be helpful in detecting their "fertile window." While kits traditionally require saliva or urine tests, a new, more expensive product called OV-Watch conducts the test by monitoring wrist perspiration. The watch, worn at night, doesn't require any self-examination. In the morning, a message on the watch face simply indicates whether you are fertile or not. The watch is said to identify the "window" days earlier than other tests. Some doctors approve of the device, but warn that benefits are limited to certain situations, such as young fertile couples frequently apart.

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The idea for OV-Watch started at Pheromone Sciences Corp., while then-Chief Scientific Officer Douglas Marett was conducting an experiment to see if hormonal changes during ovulation caused women to develop dark, greenish marks on their skin from metal jewelry. Mr. Marett couldn't prove his hypothesis, but found a correlation between ovulation and the concentration of sodium chloride in perspiration. Using this pattern, Pheromone created a wrist-watch with a microprocessor and sensor to measure changes in sodium chloride levels from the skin surface.

Scientists have known as early as 1946 that the estrogen surge that occurs prior to ovulation causes a slight rise of sodium chloride concentration in body fluids, including cervical mucus and saliva, but experts say the exact reason for this hasn't been determined. The watch, sold and made by HealthWatch-Systems Inc., is one of the first fertility detectors to measure this change from the skin. To bolster their claims, Pheromone funded a study of about 80 women using the watch, and found the results consistent with subjects' actual ovulation periods.

HealthWatchSystems markets the watch, stressing the convenience, reliability and early detection of this noninva-

sive test method. Urine tests, which are most commonly used, are able to detect only the peak of the surge of a telltale luteinizing hormone that occurs just before ovulation. If a couple waits too long after this time to have intercourse, they may miss their window, significantly reducing chances for success.

The watch, costing \$149, has a digital face with an elastic band, and measures sodium-chloride concentration through a replaceable sensor while you sleep. Then, using the information, it calculates your fertility status and displays messages like "New cycle started," "Cycle day 01," or "Not fertile."

While doctors agree that OV-Watch is useful for young couples with timing problems like mismatched work schedules, they say women over 35 who have been trying to conceive for six months should instead see their gynecologists—and women 40 and older should be consulting with their doctors from the very beginning. Because fertility decreases with age, older women should talk to their doctor and arrange for more sophisticated tests, instead of experimenting with home fertility detection methods.

Doctors say women whose menstrual cycles are within the regular 28 to 34 days can expect their ovulation to be predictable as well. So, the need for a fertility testing kit isn't really necessary in many cases. If a woman has intercourse every other day for one week, starting around the tenth day after her period, for example, this offers the best prospects for getting pregnant. Women in their 20s can try for up to one year before it's recommended they see a specialist, and should keep in mind that, at most, only one in four cycles generally is favorable for conception.

If you want to try the OV-Watch, consider your age, circumstances and how long you've tried to conceive. If you are 35 or older, you should consult a gynecologist first.