



ACHES & CLAIMS

At-Home Kits to Predict Ovulation With Less Mess Are Coming to U.S.

Microscope Indicates Fertility by Detecting 'Ferning' Pattern in Saliva Caused by Estrogen Surge



Hilin Life Products' KnoWhen microscope is one of several products designed to predict ovulation based on detecting a 'ferning' pattern in saliva. *KNOWHEN*

By LAURA JOHANNES
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3 COMMENTS

The Ache: At-home ovulation-predicting methods for optimal fertility, such as urine test strips, can be messy and expensive—and sometimes don't work.

The Claim: In a technique called "ferning," tiny microscopes are used to examine saliva samples for a fern-like pattern caused when estrogen surges just before ovulation. The microscopes offer a convenient, low-mess method for determining when a woman can conceive.

The Verdict: The saliva microscopes accurately detected estrogen surges 80% of the time in a German study published last year. Because the ferning microscopes tend to give a positive result about a day earlier than urine test strips, there may be a longer time window in which to try to conceive, scientists say.

The microscopes, costing from \$25 to \$60, are often shaped like a tube of lipstick, with a tiny, battery-powered light to make the sample easier to see. They have been available in the U.S. for more than a decade but have remained a niche product, in part because of ineffective marketing, says Helen Denise, chief executive of Hilin Life Products Inc., in Newark, N.J.

At least two companies, Hilin and RG Medical Diagnostics of Wixom, Mich., are offering new products with websites and videos to sell the concept.



Fertile-Focus, a personal ovulation-predicting microscope from Fairhaven Health. *F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

The idea behind ferning is simple. When estrogen rises in the body, so does its salt content—resulting in the fern-like pattern in saliva.

A positive ferning result indicates a woman is either ovulating, or about to—and it's a perfect time to try to conceive. The egg remains viable for 24 hours after release.

Ferning offers an alternative to urine strips, which indicate ovulation by a spike in luteinizing hormone.

The strips are about 95% accurate but don't always give clear results because the hormone surge isn't pronounced enough in some women, says Andrew Toledo, an Atlanta reproductive endocrinologist and a fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

In addition, ferning microscopes are cost-effective because they need only be purchased once. The Fertile-Focus, from Fairhaven Health, of Bellingham, Wash., costs \$27.95 and can be used indefinitely, says Ethan Lynette, company partner.

Until recently, published data on effectiveness has been scant. The German study, published last year in the journal *Gynecologic and Obstetric Investigation*, involved 47 women taking fertility drugs in a test of a microscope device from Germany's Geratherm Medical AG. RG is preparing to launch the device in the U.S. under the brand name *Your Body, Your Time*.



RG Medical Diagnostics is set to launch a microscope device from Germany's Geratherm Medical AG in the U.S. under the brand name *Your Body, Your Time*. *F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

The researchers, from University Hospitals Schleswig-Holstein in Kiel, found women's own readings of the product agreed with lab technicians' readings on a professional microscope 83% of the time. The test detected the pre-ovulation estrogen surge 80% of the time.

The study, funded by Geratherm, is "well done in terms of the quality of work and the analysis," says Dr. Toledo, who has no connection with the company. But because the women were taking fertility drugs, their estrogen levels will be higher and easier to detect, he says.

Additional studies are needed on women who aren't taking fertility drugs, he adds.

In unpublished data on 22 women who weren't taking fertility drugs, Hilin's KnoWhen microscope correctly detected ovulation, as measured by ultrasound scans, 97% of the

time, says Manhattan fertility specialist Hugh Melnick, who did the tests with funding from Hilin. The test gave a false positive result 17% of the time, adds Dr. Melnick, who owns a small company stake.

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john fitzgerald

I would wait a few years before trusting the results. I know from experience that the Thermometer is not reliable

Nov 4, 2014

Brian Seel

You could also use Natural Family Planning, its free, taught in every Catholic Diocese, and just involves a thermometer.

Nov 4, 2014

Thomas Bishop

"The strips are about 95% accurate but don't always give clear results because the hormone surge isn't pronounced enough in some women, says Andrew Toledo..." in other words, they seem unreliable for _contra_ ception v. conception.

Nov 3, 2014

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