

Working with our monthly cycle.

For too long women have pushed through life without fully understanding how our menstrual cycle impacts us outside of the few days around our period

This meant adhering to a unchanging expectation of productivity, regardless of the natural fluctuations in our energy and mood. As a Menopause Coach who navigated these challenges first hand, I've learned that recognising and embracing the changes in my cycle made the world of difference to how I (and the women I coach), operate.

After years of ignoring the impacts of female hormonal cycles because they're "complicated" recent scientific research supports a shift to tailoring your activities to your cycle to significantly improve productivity, health, and overall well-being. Working with, rather than against, your natural rhythms, creates a more balanced lifestyle, making the most of your strengths as you move through the month.

Understanding and optimising your menstrual cycle can be a game-changer, especially for busy women juggling work and family life.

Research highlights that your menstrual cycle impacts energy levels, mood, and productivity in significant ways. Here is the short version of the science of this.

- In the **Menstrual Phase (Days 1-5)**, lower energy levels and increased introspection are typical, making it a great time for rest and reflection. According to the Journal of Women's Health, this period is characterised by decreased physical performance and mood fluctuations, which can be managed by focusing on low-energy activities (Source: Journal of Women's Health, 2020).
- As you transition into the **Follicular phase (Days 6-14)**, rising estrogen levels boost energy and creativity, allowing you to tackle new projects and engage in high-intensity workouts. A study published in Sports Medicine notes that increased estrogen enhances both physical performance and cognitive function (Source: Sports Medicine, 2018).
- During the **Ovulatory phase (Days 15-17)**, peak energy and social confidence can be leveraged for high-stakes meetings and social engagements. Dr. Lisa Mosconi, a neuroscientist, explains that this phase is optimal for communication and productivity due to elevated levels of estrogen and testosterone (Source: Mosconi, 2021).
- Finally, the **Luteal phase (Days 18-28)** involves a gradual decrease in energy and can be used for completing tasks and preparing for the next cycle. The American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology suggests that during this phase, incorporating relaxation techniques and balanced nutrition helps manage premenstrual symptoms and maintain steady energy levels (Source: American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology, 2019).

Your cycle might not fit into this 28 day model but still monitoring it and your energy/vibe on a period tracking app like Clue to get a sense of your personal rhythm. I thought my body was "all over the place" until I realised there was actually an underlying rhythm there.

I get this feels like a completely unachievable goal. I mean you can't ask the school to shift your child's camp you are helping out on, but you can ask to be on dishes instead of supervising the hike if you think your period is due. If you have a big brainstorming session the week of your period, maybe use the week prior to write down your thinking so you are prepped ahead of time or cancel other things so you can use your "one cup of energy" at the session.

These small shifts can have a big impact- if all you take from this resource to have grace for yourself some weeks then that will still make a huge difference!

1. Menstrual Phase (Days 1-5)

Overall Characteristics: This phase is characterised by lower energy levels and a focus on introspection. It's a time for rest and reflection.

Home Life:

- **Simplify Tasks:** Opt for low-energy activities and delegate chores where possible. Research indicates that energy levels are naturally lower during menstruation, making it a good time for less demanding tasks. Just take it easy and stick to basics (the things you can't get out of) (Source: American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology).
- **Self-Care:** Incorporate relaxation practices like meditation or gentle yoga to manage stress and discomfort. Get early nights.

Movement:

- **Gentle Movements:** Engage in light exercise like walking or restorative yoga. Studies show that light physical activity can help alleviate menstrual discomfort (Source: Journal of Women's Health).
- **Rest:** Allow yourself extra rest and recovery time as your body is focusing on menstruation.

Nutrition:

- **Comfort Foods:** Focus on nourishing, easy-to-digest meals rich in iron (e.g., leafy greens, legumes) to replenish lost nutrients. High protein, nuts, seeds and bone broth. Turmeric and Ginger are examples of food to reduce inflammation (you may also choose to limit dairy and gluten during this week).
- **Increase protein intake** to combat carbohydrate cravings- lean meats, cheese, eggs, protein berry shakes.
- **Hydrate:** Increase water intake to combat bloating and fatigue. Limit alcohol during this week as it will inhibit your sleep and increase inflammation

Career:

- **Strategic Planning:** Use this time for reflection and to finalise plans for the coming cycle. Lower energy can be leveraged for reflective thinking rather than high-intensity tasks.
- **Being Grounded:** Instead of naming the feeling as flat (or as I used to say to a friend "I'm the one bleeding out in the corner") I shifted my thinking to see it actually as being really grounded- simply I had no energy for any other emotion. Being less excitable about things means you are more likely to calmly and slowly work through an issue. Nothing really bothered me at work and I started to use it as a strength that week. Finding space to just slowly and steadily work through things.
- **Delegation:** Prioritise delegating tasks and focus on high-level big picture thinking, aligning with the natural rhythm of your cycle.

Personalisation Tip: Adjust recommendations based on your cycle length and individual symptoms. Track your cycle and note how your energy levels and mood fluctuate. The energy shift between end of cycle and beginning of cycle can differ for each person and sometimes month to month. Just track it and notice how you are feeling.

2. Follicular Phase (Days 6-14)

Overall Characteristics: Energy levels rise, creativity and motivation increase, and the focus shifts to new beginnings.

Home Life:

- **Organise:** This is often the week you look around and think “when did this place get into such a mess!” Tackle home organisation, decluttering, decorating projects. Increased energy and motivation make this a good time for such activities.
- **Social Activities:** Plan social events or family outings; you'll have more enthusiasm and social energy. So all the things you put off last week are good to do this week. This is also the week to be careful of not overscheduling yourself for the end of the month.

Movement:

- **High-Intensity Workouts:** Engage in high-energy workouts that suit your fitness level, from brisk walking, (include some hills) running or strength training. Research suggests that this phase is ideal for more intense physical activity (Source: Sports Medicine).
- **Increase your incidental movement:** get off train/bus one stop away from where you are headed, take the stairs at work or find time for a walk at lunchtime.
- **Variety:** Try new exercise routines or sports to match your heightened energy levels. If you are already working out, this might be the week to try HIIT workouts, add jumping into your squats - if you aren't currently working out, it could just be putting some music on and having a dance party in kitchen.

Nutrition:

- **Fresh Foods:** Incorporate fresh fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins to support your rising energy.
- **Add complex carbohydrates** for energy as metabolism will ramp up (lean meat, eggs, kumara, quinoa etc)
- **Balance:** Focus on balanced meals with complex carbs and proteins to sustain your energy levels without reverting to sugar.

Career:

- **Innovate:** Use this phase for brainstorming and initiating new projects. Your increased creativity and motivation are perfect for driving innovation.
- **Engage:** Actively participate in meetings and drive team collaboration, leveraging your peak energy.
- **Have networking meetings** in diary and plan to catch up with people (possibly the people you pushed out last week).

Personalisation Tip: Tailor exercise intensity and social plans to fit your specific energy peaks. Monitor how your body responds and adjust accordingly. If you have heavy periods you may still feel low energy after your period ends so take it gently until it comes back. Nourish your body with high iron foods to help replace what you have lost.

3. Ovulatory Phase (Days 15-17)

Overall Characteristics: Peak energy and confidence, heightened social interaction, and a focus on communication and productivity.

Home Life:

- **Host Events:** Plan and host gatherings or family celebrations. Your peak energy and social confidence are ideal for hosting.
- **Active Projects:** Start or advance home improvement projects, leveraging your enthusiasm and efficiency.

Movement:

- **Peak Performance:** Push your limits with vigorous movement and activities. Your physical performance is likely at its best during this phase. If you are currently exercising this is the week to push for a personal best. If you are new to movement, this might be the time to up it a little, try adding in another walk or make this the week you attempt something you've always wanted to do.
- **Social Sports:** You could schedule in group fitness classes to capitalise on your heightened social energy—eg this is the week you go to yoga class, meet a friend for tennis or plan a walk.

Nutrition:

- **Balanced Meals:** Focus on nutrient-dense foods to maintain high energy levels (berries, salmon, chia seeds, nuts, avocado).
- **Hydration:** Keep up with hydration to support your body's increased activity levels.

Career:

- **Leadership:** During this week, make the most of energy and take the lead on presentations, negotiations, or important meetings. Your confidence and communication skills are at their peak.
- **Networking:** Focus on building relationships and expanding your professional network, as you are more sociable and persuasive. Pro Tip: don't schedule in heaps for next few weeks. This is exactly when extroverted you makes plans that the soon to be introverted you won't want to follow through on.
- **Visibility:** you might be more creative with writing so write some LinkedIn/Newsletter, updates to Executive emails/ posts this week and save them to share later.

Personalisation Tip: Use this phase to evaluate how well your current routine supports your peak energy and adjust as needed to maximise productivity and engagement. Remember the peak you feel this week is not sustainable all month. Enjoy it for the peak it is and don't beat yourself up in two weeks time when you think, but I was doing so well....

4. Luteal Phase (Days 18-28)

Overall Characteristics: Energy levels start to decrease, with a focus on completing tasks and preparing for the next cycle. This phase can involve fluctuating moods and increased introspection. This might feel like you are having to push hard to do what you were doing easily last two weeks. Its a bit harder to get out of bed and do the movement regime you started two weeks ago etc. You don't need to double down and push harder on yourself.

Home Life:

- **Complete Projects:** Focus on finishing tasks and projects around the house. This phase is ideal for wrapping up ongoing tasks.
- **Prepare:** Use this time to prepare for any upcoming busy periods or holidays.

Movement:

- **Moderate Workouts:** Although you might be tempted to not exercise at all this week, instead try to just take it down a notch.
- You might do your resistance workouts slower, opting for less reps at a slower pace/ lighter weights.
- You could switch to slower longer steady state moderate-intensity exercise like cycling or swimming. This matches the gradual decrease in energy levels
- **Self-Care:** Include relaxation techniques and stress-reducing activities to manage any premenstrual symptoms. Try meditation in the mornings and evenings, especially if your sleep is worse in this phase.

Nutrition:

- **Comfort Foods:** Incorporate magnesium-rich foods (e.g., nuts, seeds, dark chocolate, whole grains) to help manage PMS symptoms.
- **Supplement support:** There are lots of great supplements that support our bodies during this time so checking these out can be useful.
- **Balance:** Maintain balanced meals to manage cravings and support steady energy.

Career:

- **Consolidate:** Look around and see what is unfinished. Wrap up ongoing projects and prepare detailed reports or summaries. This is a good time for finishing tasks and reflecting on accomplishments.
- **Reflect:** Use this time for reflection and planning for the next cycle. Prepare for meetings or deadlines with a focus on detail-oriented tasks. This will probably not be your most creative strategic week.
- If sleep is a problem for you consider adjusting your working times/places to assist with feeling tired etc.

Personalisation Tip: Adjust your nutrition and Movement based on how you experience premenstrual symptoms and energy fluctuations. Consider keeping a journal to track patterns and make personalised adjustments.

Resources to follow up on

Do your own research - there is loads of information out there.
Here are some article and books to get you started.

Articles (cut and paste into your browser)

<https://www.healthline.com/health/womens-health/guide-to-cycle-syncing-how-to-start>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/cycle-syncing-for-well-being-8597591>

<https://reallyncitea.com/blogs/journal/why-you-should-sync-your-business-with-your-menstrual-cycle?srsId=AfmBOoeNpwsYTqcdV0CUz1N2HFBtfKntWhoCXL4CftPjL5HJRfKThYr>

Books

Womancode: Perfect your cycle by Alisa Vitti and her second book **In the FLO: Unlock Your Hormonal Advantage and Revolutionize Your Life**

Both focus on aligning your diet, exercise, and daily routines with the phases of your menstrual cycle to optimise health and productivity.

Period Power: Harness Your Hormones and Get Your Cycle Working For You by Maisie Hill

A guide to understanding and embracing your menstrual cycle for improved well-being, energy, and personal empowerment.

ROAR: How to Match Your Food and Fitness to Your Unique Female Physiology for Optimum Performance, Great Health, and a Strong, Lean Body for Life by Dr. Stacy Sims

A science-based guide focusing on how women can tailor their nutrition and fitness to their unique physiology, especially around their menstrual cycle.

Next Level: Your Guide to Kicking Ass, Feeling Great, and Crushing Goals Through Menopause and Beyond by Dr. Stacy Sims

Focuses on how women can optimize their health, fitness, and nutrition during menopause, providing insights on staying strong and feeling great during this life phase.

Fix Your Period: Six Weeks to Banish Bloating, Conquer Cramps, Manage Moodiness, and Ignite Lasting Hormone Balance by Nicole Jardim

A holistic program for understanding and balancing hormones, with an emphasis on managing period-related issues and syncing with your cycle.

