

Menstrual Health

Optimising your well being around the seasons of your cycle

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom"

ARISTOTLE

PHASES OF YOUR CYCLE

Understanding your menstrual cycle and how it impacts your body and mind can help you optimise your health.

A typical cycle lasts for 27-29 days, and can be divided into four seasons (based on the hormonal changes that occur).

We can liken the phases of the cycle to that of the seasons based on how we may feel and act. When you think about nature and the changes that happen throughout the seasons, the same sort of changes happen to our bodies.

Everyone's cycle is different; therefore, it is recommended that you track your cycle in an effort to gain a great understanding of what your body is doing. You can use apps or a diary. Track things like mood, energy, body temp, cervical fluid.

Having some awareness of your cycle allows you to say 'yes' and to embrace natural talents and opportunities when you feel like it. It is also important to be able to put more support in place at times when you are feeling more vulnerable and needing extra TLC.

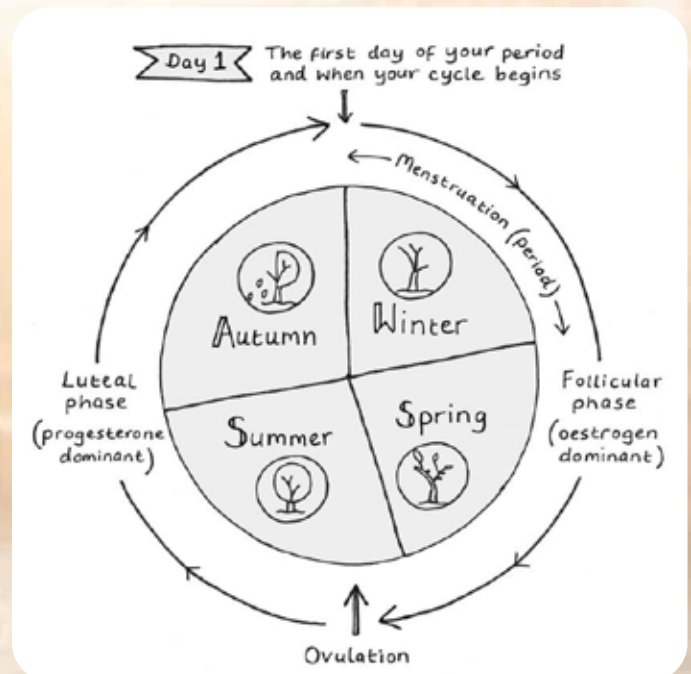


Image sourced from: <https://thedaohhealth.com.au/what-happens-in-your-menstrual-cycle/>



PIONEER
Pelvic Pain Clinic

MENSTRUATION OR PERIOD

Winter

The Early Follicular Phase, also known as the Menstrual Phase, is the first phase of your menstrual cycle, which usually lasts between 3 to 7 days and is characterized by the shedding of the lining of the uterus (also known as the endometrium). The season of winter refers to the idea that this is a great time to slow down, rest and nourish our body.

During this phase your progesterone and oestrogen fall - this triggers the release of prostaglandin. As the prostaglandins are released, they trigger a "constricting" message to the smooth muscle. This is what may contribute to cramps and may even impact your bowels.

What you may notice

- Basal body temp (BBT) drops a day or so before your period starts.
- Bloating, breast tenderness, emotional tension.
- You may start to bleed.
- You may experience menstrual cramps.
- Your boundaries may drop, and you may feel more vulnerable.

Practical tips

- Take a break or step back from social media.
- Take the time to focus on your needs and be clear about your priorities.
- Embrace a good book.
- Listen to a guided meditation.
- Enjoy your lunch break outside.
- Attend a yoga class or try some meditation.
- Get some happy hormones (endorphins, oxytocin and dopamine) hits: laughing, getting outside, gentle movement and exercise.

FOLLICULAR PHASE

Spring

This phase can last anywhere from 7 to 21 days but is widely variable and accounts for variations in cycle length and ovulation. Follicle stimulating hormone (**FSH**) is **pushing the follicles into line and closer to ovulation. The follicles begin to release oestrogen.** Oestrogen stimulates mood and libido in turn boosting serotonin (feel-good hormone). **Oestrogen thickens the uterine lining** to prepare for potential implantation to occur if you are trying to conceive. It also drives the fertile cervical mucus which is why you have more of this around ovulation when oestrogen is at its highest.

What you may feel and notice

- Inner spark
- Resilient
- Social
- Curious
- Creative
- Motivated
- Energetic
- An increase in cervical fluid and sexual desire.
- If you are depleted from your period then prioritise resting, eating nourishing food and speak to your GP about why you are feeling so fatigued.
- As oestrogen rises it causes a contraction in the smooth muscle in your intestines - this wave-like movement is known as peristalsis and keeps your digestion moving. There is also an increase in the diversity of microbiome within your gut, which is a positive for your gut health and immune health.
- If you are prone to IBS then oestrogen can cause hypersensitivity and sometimes pain and spasm.
- Be mindful that as you get closer to ovulation, higher levels of oestrogen may also make you prone to injury, so form is important when playing sports or lifting weights.
- Cervical fluid begins to increase and helps with vaginal lubrication. If you are prone to vaginal dryness then your oestrogen levels could be low.

Practical tips

- Schedule in social catch ups.
- Try something new.
- Book fun activities in with your friends, family or children.
- Form new habits and routines.
- This is a great time to push yourself and challenge yourself with exercise.
- You have a higher tolerance for endurance and pain and your uptake of oxygen is better, so you will recover quicker. This is a good time to try and hit those PBs.
- Ensure you have a good routine of eating regularly and getting plenty of sleep.
- Include lots of healthy fats in your diet i.e. wild salmon, olive oil, grass fed butter, nuts, seeds, avocados and olives.
- Limit coffee, alcohol.

OVULATION

Summer

Ovulation is recognised as the season of Summer – it's big, bright, and makes you feel good! **Oestrogen reaches its peak** in the final push towards ovulation.

Luteinising Hormone (LH) and testosterone enter the scene. There is a short period after ovulation when **oestrogen, LH and testosterone are all low and progesterone is only just starting to rise.**

What you may feel and notice

- Strong and unstoppable.
- Clearer in your thoughts and actions.
- You may notice increased lubrication.
- You are at your most fertile.
- Your cervix may be soft, high, open and wet.
- Increased productivity.
- Sometimes the peaking of oestrogen may make you feel restless. If you are sensitive to oestrogen, you might feel too high to concentrate on anything and some people may experience a little lull after ovulation.
- Oestrogen increases blood flow to your genitals.

Practical tips

- You may feel confident and outgoing, so make the most of this.
- Can cope with a heavier workload and longer days.
- Explore networking and socialising opportunities.
- Embrace the feeling of wanting increasing pleasure and fun.
- You may notice an increase in your appetite once you ovulate as progesterone rises. Now is the time to up the protein and good fats to help stabilize your blood sugars and mood.
- Alcohol intake around ovulation can increase oestrogen levels (and sometimes testosterone and LH too). This may make you more prone to the hormonal drop off.

LUTEAL PHASE

Autumn

The Late Luteal phase is the final phase of your menstrual cycle and generally commences on day 21 and ends on day 28 on a standard 28-day cycle. During this phase, your **progesterone levels increase**, which can cause symptoms such as bloating, breast tenderness, and mood changes, also known as PMS. Progesterone may slow you down and keep you safe. You might find that your digestion also slows down (aka constipation) - essentially it is allowing your gut to absorb more nutrients.

What you may feel and notice

- The productive energy that you notice in spring and summer may be interrupted.
- Energy levels may start to drop.
- We may be more sensitive to criticism.
- Your hormones will make you prioritise you, they may show up when you are tired, hungry or vulnerable.
- For some, Autumn may feel calming after summer (particularly if you are sensitive to oestrogen rising).
- Serotonin drops as oestrogen drops resulting in a dip in mood and increase in appetite.
- Body can feel swollen.
- Energy may start to dip.

Practical tips

- Progesterone is the nesting hormone - we may feel drawn to tidy and organise things.
- Slow down and take your time.
- Prone to blood sugar and insulin imbalances.
- Prioritise protein and healthy fats - this will help to keep cravings for caffeine, processed foods and excess sugar.
- Keep your fluid (water) intake up to ensure bowels remain regular.
- Make the most of the opportunity to get some extra sleep. Sleep can help to control stress, manage appetite.
- Movement and exercise is a great way to stimulate the bowel and improve sleep.
- Exercise will also help to release endorphins - this will help to reduce the symptoms of PMS.
- Rest when you need to and respect where you are at.
- Cook ahead. Try making some meals so that you are prepared when struggling with fatigue.



PERI MENOPAUSE AND MENOPAUSE

- Menopause itself is one day – and is generally one year after having your last period. Perimenopause is the period of time preceding menopause.
- There may be changes in menstrual flow and pattern.
- Some people might experience hot flushes, night sweats, insomnia and fatigue.
- 95% of women will transition between ages 44 and 56, with the average age being 50.
- With time oestrogen levels begin to fall- symptoms of oestrogen deficiency such as vaginal dryness, painful sex, issues with incontinence, overactive bladder, hot flushes, night sweats, insomnia.
- Stress reduction is important as it helps to reduce cortisol levels.
- Exercise plays an important role in managing stress- you can reduce the intensity of your workouts so as not to push yourself into the stress response.

Key points for optimal well being throughout the seasons of your life

- Make small changes to your habits and choices, bit by bit they all add up. If we try to do too much at once it may shock our nervous system into feeling stressed.
- Try adding things in, rather than focusing on taking away.
- Focus on the variables or factors that you can control i.e. nutrition, hydration, movement.
- Optimising these factors may then have a flow on effect to how we digest our food, sleep and stress.
- Digestion is important - this enables us to extract the nutrients we need and get rid of the excess.
- Look at supplements / dietary changes (seek the advice from a dietician/ nutritionist) that can help to reduce inflammation.
- Avoid heavily processed foods, sugar, alcohol can add to inflammation.
- Increase dietary fibre intake as this will help with digestion.
- Reduce alcohol intake.
- Eat breakfast: this should include protein and healthy fats e.g. eggs, avocado, nuts, seeds. This helps to regulate blood sugars and kick start your digestion.
- Increase vegetable intake - a great way to add fibre and nutrients to your diet.
- Ensure adequate protein intake - protein is the building block for all the structures in our body. You need protein to build and maintain muscle and repair tissue.
- Optimise melatonin release, get a lot of sunlight during the day, dark room at night, reduce caffeine after 2pm, limit alcohol and sugar before bed, limit screen time.
- Use of heat such as heat pack, warm bath / shower or hot water bottle can be useful for cramps.



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