



*The 4 Phases of a Woman's Menstrual Cycle*

*by Molly Helfend*



January is the month of resolutions and change. SuperFeast is honoring this intentional season as women's health month, *encouraging women to go inward and make resolutions for self care and love.*

One aspect of women's health that is not acknowledged enough is our cyclical health - and yes I am referring to our hormonal menstrual cycles. **Women ebb and flow with lunar patterns, also known as our infradian rhythm.** Other examples of earthly infradian rhythms include *breeding, hibernation, migration, molting, and tidal and seasonal cycles.*

However, most genders think of a menstrual cycle as only the 3 to 7 days of actual bleeding. But, a woman's cycle is a 21 to 35 day affair, split into **four phases - menstrual, follicular, ovulatory, and luteal.** These phases are influenced by natural shifts and fluctuations of hormones. This means that a woman's entire being is affected by the internal natural rhythms of the monthly menstruation cycle.

There are strengths in each phase, and so developing a healthy relationship and awareness of your personal cycle can help maximize your life potential, *while supporting your beautiful, divine feminine body.*



# Menstrual

## DAYS

1 to 5 days

## SEASON

Winter

## ELEMENT

Earth

## HERBAL SUPPORT

- Qi
- Chaga
- Astragalus
- Turkey Tail



## THE SCIENCE

On the first day of bleeding, also known as your period, the uterine lining sheds due to low estrogen and progesterone levels. They signal your pituitary gland to produce follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), which then indicates to one of your ovaries to begin ripening follicles in preparation for an egg to release. The shedding of the uterine lining can last anywhere from 3 to 7 days. This phase will last until your bleed fades away.

During the menstruation phase, your cervical fluid is dry and your immune system is at its weakest. During a woman's menstrual cycle, 80% of the immune system is redirected towards assisting the reproductive system. That means that only 20% of the immune system is left to support any other health issues your body may be working to heal.

## FEELING

During menstruation, women's energy is usually at its lowest. You may feel tired, withdrawn and emotional. However, despite fatigue, ethnobotanical studies show that many indigenous cultures considered moontime especially sacred, with some even gathering in menstrual huts to bleed together and connect to their intuitive strength.

## TO DO

Just like the winter season, during menstruation we typically go inwards and hibernate. This is the time to rest and focus on self care rituals.

- Nap and rest
- Nourishing baths
- Relaxing activities
- Journal
- Set intentions for the upcoming month

## EXERCISE

Engage in slow movement such as walking or restorative/Yin yoga.

## FOOD

It's important to replenish your body with foods rich in iron and zinc such as:

- Nettle
- Spirulina
- Spinach
- Kelp
- Sprouts
- Microgreens
- Collard greens
- Pumpkin seeds
- Radishes
- Artichokes
- Parsley
- Onions
- Raw honey
- Grass Fed/Sustainably Sourced Red Meat (Beef/Kangaroo/Venison), Liver, Bone Broth and Duck, Wild Caught Seafood\*



# Follicular

## DAYS

7 to 10 days

## SEASON

Spring

## ELEMENT

Air

## HERBAL SUPPORT

- Shiitake
- Neural Nectar
- Beauty Blend



## THE SCIENCE

This phase is prepping your body for ovulation. FSH and oestrogen levels begin to rise, which helps follicles in the ovary mature. Oestrogen stimulates the lining of the uterus to thicken, which suppresses your appetite, while testosterone also rises, which stimulates your libido. During the follicular phase, cervical fluid can be identified as white, creamy, and/or tacky.

## FEELING

This pre-ovulation stage gives women a tremendous boost in confidence, mood, energy and libido. Mental clarity and creativity are at their peak, which makes you feel sociable, motivated and adventurous.

## TO DO

Just as the spring season brings fresh awakening to the earth, this is the phase where we free ourselves from the heaviness and lethargy of the hibernation season.

- Physical activity
- Socializing
- Learning new hobbies or skills
- Go on a spontaneous adventure
- Craft or creative projects
- Speaking your truth

## EXERCISE


Regular movement through cardio or exercise classes is important for mobilizing fat, stabilizing blood sugar and releasing high amounts of energy.

## FOOD

Although you may be craving lighter meals, don't forget to fuel your body with foods that sustain your increased energy such as:

- Carrots
- Flaxseeds
- Dandelion
- Milk thistle
- Sweet potato
- Sunflower seeds
- Broccoli sprouts
- Citrus
- Berries
- Gluten-free oats
- Free-Range Eggs, Sustainable Sourced Chicken, Wild-Caught Fish, Mussels\*





# Ovulatory

## DAYS

3 to 5 days (*1 day for ovulation*)

## SEASON

Summer

## ELEMENT

Fire

## HERBAL SUPPORT

- Cordyceps
- Jing
- I Am Gaia
- Tremella



## THE SCIENCE

This is the time when our hormones reach their peak. Your pituitary gland releases luteinising hormone (LH) that stimulates the follicle to release an egg, which then promotes the uterine lining to thicken as estrogen rises. About 24 to 36 hours after LH surges, ovulation occurs, which is your body's way of saying it's ready for pregnancy. The egg will die or dissolve if it isn't fertilized and your menses will begin about 14 days following ovulation.

The remaining ovarian structure becomes the corpus luteum, which produces progesterone. You can identify this fertile time by your cervical fluid, which has lots of elasticity, with a clear, egg white slippery consistency.

## FEELING

Thanks to an estrogen boost, women tend to feel incredible! Confidence is glowing and sexuality and connection feel right at our fingertips.

## TO DO

Ovulation is at a peak point in your cycle, just as summer is the fiery Yang of the year. This season and phase brings about extroverted, dynamic action.

- Physical movement
- Playful activities
- Date nights
- Job interviews
- Networking and community events
- Step out of your comfort zone

## EXERCISE

This is the time to engage in high intensity workouts such as running, HIIT, cycling, swimming. If you are looking for a physical release of sexual energy besides intercourse, try pole dancing, yoga, self pleasure or ecstatic dance.

## FOOD

Focus on foods that support liver detoxification and balance blood sugar such as:

- Flax seeds
- Chia seeds
- Cruciferous vegetables
- Sprouts
- Berries
- Celery juice
- Figs
- Red beans
- Amla
- Pomegranate
- Wild Caught Salmon and Tuna, Free-Range Eggs, Sustainably Sourced Lamb\*





# Luteal

## DAYS

10 to 14 days

## SEASON

Autumn

## ELEMENT

Water

## HERBAL SUPPORT

- Reishi
- Shen
- Ashwagandha
- Schisandra



## THE SCIENCE

Estrogen and progesterone increase and the endometrial lining thickens so that it will be in the right condition for nourishment of a fertilized egg. If implantation does not occur, estrogen and progesterone levels decline and the lining eventually begins to be shed, also known as menstruation.

Although the first 2 to 3 days of this phase can act a lot like the ovulatory phase, this decline in hormones during the second half of this phase is notoriously difficult for many women if their system is out of balance! Pre-menstruum non fertile cervical fluid is chalky, dry, thick, and white.

## FEELING

Your body is signaled to slow down and start preparing for winter menstrual hibernation. Flowing like water, women's emotions can easily shift, swirl and surge during this time.

## TO DO

Autumn is a time to wind down and shift your energy and priorities.

- Set boundaries
- Earthing or grounding
- Self-care
- Nesting
- To-do lists
- Create ritual space
- Be gentle on your imperfections

## EXERCISE

During the first half, try strength training and light cardio and in the second half, try hatha yoga, pilates, or walking.

## FOOD

Liver-supporting foods and herbs help your body eliminate any excess hormones that can intensify PMS symptoms. Women crave comfort carbohydrates because they help uplift mood, which offsets the lack of estrogen-associated serotonin. Instead, focus on foods such as:

- Green leafy vegetables
- Bananas
- Black beans
- Figs
- Raspberry leaf
- Peppermint
- Root vegetables
- Quinoa
- Buckwheat
- Sesame seeds
- Dates
- Ginger
- Wild-Caught Salmon/Fish (Sardines/Mackerel) Grass-Fed/Sustainably Sourced Red Meat (Beef/Kangaroo/Venison)\*



