

# FEMALE HEALTH: UNDERSTANDING THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE



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WHAT'S INSIDE?



**GET STARTED**

# DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

**There are slight differences in the way women are physiologically and even psychologically to men.**

Firstly, women's hormones fluctuate throughout a monthly cycle, whereas men's tend to be fairly stable throughout each month, so with these hormonal fluctuations, it can make things slightly different for women when it comes to not only fat loss, but even just general life, nutrition and training.

Women also store more fat in the gluteal-femoral region in the hips, thighs and glutes whereas men typically store it usually in the visceral / abdominal area.

Scale weight can also fluctuate a fair bit in women due to the fluctuation of hormones, of course it is normal for anyone's weight to fluctuate, but we may see it more in women especially around menstruation.

Another thing to keep in mind with women is the fact that we commonly have PMS symptoms and periods each month, and this can also affect our energy levels and motivation as well as even hunger too. Because of this, it can make it harder for women to diet through this part of the cycle.



## **CHAPTER 1**

# **PHASES OF THE CYCLE**

The length of each women's menstrual cycle will differ, but anything between 21-35 days is normal with **28-30 being the average**.

**We have four phases of the menstrual cycle;**

### Menstruation...

Is the first day of bleeding, or the period. This is also Day 1 of the cycle and Day 1 of the Follicular Phase. Menstruation or the period can last for 4-7 days depending on the person.

In this phase, hormones are low and the endometrium is shed if no egg has implanted into the lining.

### Follicular Phase...

Starts on Day 1 of the cycle and that also means Day 1 of menstruation too. It lasts from Day 1 until ovulation, which on average is day 14 but it is not a definite amount and ovulation will differ from each women.

This phase is all about building up the endometrial lining ready for ovulation and for an egg to implant when it is released. Estrogen is the dominant hormone in this phase.

### Luteal Phase...

starts straight after ovulation and lasts for around 10-16 days. Progesterone is released from the follicle that the egg is released from which turns into a temporary endocrine gland called the corpus luteum.

This phase lasts until the next period - unless of course a woman falls pregnant where there will be no shedding of the endometrial lining and a period will not arrive.

### Ovulation...

Is the main event of the menstrual cycle. This is where a mature egg is released from a follicle in the ovary. This event lasts for around 24 hours, but it can last for 48 hours IF a second egg is released within the initial 24 hours (think about how twins are made, two eggs instead of one is released!). This is more uncommon but obviously not impossible. It is important to note that we do not ovulate on hormonal birth control.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **TRAINING THROUGHOUT THE CYCLE**

**Training throughout the cycle again, will differ person to person, but we will run through a rough guide.**

The best frame for training during the cycle is usually around **Day 7-9 to Day 25-27** if we go off of an average 30 day cycle.

## **DAY 7**

The reason for this is because when the period ends, estrogen starts to rise again around Day 7 where it peaks just before ovulation.

This hormone increasing again means that mood, energy, strength and overall motivation will be improved compared to during menstruation where hormones are lower.

During ovulation, testosterone slightly increases (but otherwise it is fairly stable) which can make it a great time for training; not only motivation wise but strength and energy wise too.

Once ovulation has occurred, Estrogen slowly decreases over the next 7 days (it doesn't drop, but just decreases overtime so it is still present).

## **DAY 21**

Progesterone begins to rise and peaks around Day 21, meaning this is also still a great time to train.

It then starts to decrease again as we come into a new cycle and menstruation, and then as we get towards the later stage of the luteal phase it can make training a little harder due to hormones dropping compared to the mid range of the cycle where the hormones are higher.

Training around the period including the few days before and the first few days of may need to be adjusted to suit your energy levels and personal symptoms if any. This could be the time where we may want to decrease load and volume and maybe focus on lower intensity exercise if needed.

## **CHAPTER 3**

# **DIETING AROUND THE CYCLE**

## Follicular Phase

Nutrition will most likely be **fairly normal in the Follicular Phase** and you will probably notice yourself not being overly hungry or craving any sugar, but just being satisfied with what you'd usually eat.

**As we move into the Luteal Phase things can change.**

## Luteal Phase

The hormone progesterone actually increases body temperature, which in return can increase metabolic rate. **Progesterone peaks at around Day 21**, and the week before a woman's period is commonly the time where women tend to notice increased hunger.

This could mean that mid to late luteal phase can make it slightly more difficult to stick to your normal calories or amount of food, especially if you are in a calorie deficit.

Women also experience more hunger the couple days before and of menstruation, so increasing your calories may be needed around this time and it is totally okay to do so if you need it! It is fairly normal to experience hunger and cravings just before your period – there is a lot going on in your body so it can help to increase calories if it is needed. If your goal is fat loss, going completely off the rails each time can possibly affect your results, so if you have a coach talk to them about how you can manage your cravings and possibly increase calories slightly to avoid going overboard.



**CHAPTER 4**

**PMS  
(PREMENSTRUAL  
SYNDROME)**

PMS can affect each woman differently and it is important to note if you have severe PMS each month you should check with your doctor.

## Some Symptoms Are:

- 1 BLOATING
- 2 FATIGUE
- 3 HUNGER
- 4 CRAVINGS
- 5 BACK ACHE
- 6 MOOD SWINGS
- 7 STOMACH CRAMPS
- 8 LACK OF ENERGY



PMS can start anywhere around **1-5 days before the period** and usually gets a tad worse just beforehand.

It is important to note that not **EVERYONE** will get bad PMS – and remember if you do to check with your doctor. The best thing to do around this time is to be in touch with how you feel and not to tell yourself you are going to feel bad. Some people may be able to have great gym sessions the day before their period and others may not make it to the gym.

Don't expect a certain outcome, just take each day and notice how you feel and remember that if you need to lower the intensity or take some extra rest around this time of your cycle it is totally ok to do so!

## CHAPTER 5

# SCALE WEIGHT

## Being a woman, scale weight fluctuations are **VERY common.**

It is very normal to weigh more in the days leading up to your period and whilst you are menstruating too. The body is doing a lot through this time and hormones are fluctuating, so it is very common and extremely normal to either see the scales not move, or even increase during this time.

Some women can experience weight increases of up to 4-5lbs – so don't be disheartened or disappointed if you see your weight increase, it is perfectly normal. Body measurements can also change during this time due to possible water retention and bloating.

Scale weight can also fluctuate all the time and even throughout the cycle so using other forms of progress measurements is helpful too such as progress photos and even measurements.



**CHAPTER 6**

**SLEEP**

**Sleep can also be affected during the cycle. The fluctuations of hormones can affect a woman's ability to fall asleep and stay asleep as well as influence the quality of sleep too.**

Some women even experience insomnia around their periods too. The hormone progesterone is a calming hormone and is actually really good for sleep. When this drops just before the period, it can actually affect the quality of sleep women get in the premenstrual phase.

Exercise can help to promote deep sleep stages, so exercising in your premenstrual phase if you can, even if its walking and lower intensity may help improve sleep around this time as well as relaxing before bed and doing sleep promoting things such as reading instead of watching TV.



**REMEMBER...**

**Healthy isn't a goal.  
It's a way of living.**



**LAUCARFITNESS**