

CYCLES

Going with the menstrual flow - creating balance in your life

Believe it or not, the menstrual cycle can teach you (man or woman, adult or child, menstruating or non-menstruating) about how to balance your life, enjoy better health and have you feeling good.

You may have noticed that your health and your life doesn't tend to look like a straight line on a graph, but more like a wave on the ocean – having its up and downs. The waxing and waning of the moon and the ebb and flow of the tide are two of nature's cycles that can teach you balance. You can't have one phase without the other. This ebb and flow is also reflected in the two different phases of the menstrual cycle.

Women have been given this wonderful natural wave-like cycle (“God help us!” say the men) to help keep them (the women) stay in balance. (men might say “imbalanced”). Too often however you women prefer to be a machine on auto-pilot rather than surfing the waves and going with the flow. You men can also take a surfing lesson and learn to stay balanced on the board! Let's take a look at some of the changes in the menstrual cycle, which include:

Basal temperature	Vitality and attractiveness
Mucus-quality and quantity	Energy levels and activities
Hormone balance (LH FSH Oestrogen Progesterone)	Cravings and appetite
Changes in the cervix	Health status
Changes in the endometrium (lining of the womb/uterus)	Emotions and behaviour
Sexual desire	Need for rest, relaxation and space
	Focus - inward or outward, creative or reflective

Put simply, these changes are there for a reason and you need to take note of them and work with them and your body. Like I said, let go of the reins and try going with the flow in an alternating pattern, rather than working your body like a machine, that you try to control.

The “act and discover” and “rest and recover” phases

The menstrual cycle has two phases, which I call the “act and discover” and the “rest and recover” phases and the cycle includes two key elements – ovulation and menstruation. Let's take a look at how you can apply these phases and elements to your health and well-being.

Menstruation to ovulation - Crest of the wave - Light of day - Act and discover

From the beginning of menstruation until ovulation, (follicular phase symbolised by the crest of the wave and waxing moon) the egg is growing, ripening and getting prepared to be released at ovulation for conception. In this phase of your cycle, you are setting the scene, initiating new projects, developing, creating, growing and preparing to “give birth” to something. You are often “super-charged” with an outward, active focus - feeling at your best with loads of ideas, enthusiasm and optimism. People around you either love your motivation, task completion and generally happy and sociable mood, or they don't get a look in because of your “head down, butt up” attitude!

Ovulation – Peak Creativity

Ovulation represents creativity at its highest. At mid-cycle, “all systems are go” and you are naturally more receptive to other people and to new ideas – you are more “fertile”.

Ovulation, (symbolised by the full moon) is accompanied by a sudden rise in your hormones - reflected by a temperature rise in your body, the cervix softens and rises, cervical mucus becomes

wet and slippery, the lining of the womb thickens to prepare for a baby to take root and your sexual desire also tends to increase as your “sexual attractiveness” hormones and scents are in “full swing” and an egg is released.

Ovulation to Menstruation - Trough of the wave - Dark of the night – Rest and Recover

The second phase, (luteal phase symbolised by the trough of the wave and waning moon) is your more evaluative and reflective time, a time to rest and recover and let the project take root. Physically, the baby that may, or may not, have been created, is settling into its new home environment. This phase gives you a chance to look back upon what has been created. No wonder in this phase, you want to go inward and spend more time alone and crave the comfort of chocolate, a warm nook and a good book. Emotions sometimes have the better of you, and your loved ones may take a wide berth around you, but this emotional time pinpoints what needs addressing in your life. Take note of what arises and do something about it in the next “act and discover” phase.

I see red, I see red, I see red! - Period time

One of New Zealand’s most famous music groups Crowded House – formerly Split Enz - sang a song called “I see red, I see red, I see red.” It wasn’t written as such about menstruation, but the whole connotation of “seeing red” is typically about fuelled emotions, which tend to surface and resurface just prior to, or at, menstruation. Some of you women may find your period annoying, an inconvenience and a “pain” – probably because that is the way that you have been introduced to it with shame, humiliation and bad words and seen as something to be hidden or avoided.

I would love you however to consider menstruation as a blessing! It is a great time for shedding what is no longer required in your life, letting go of control, de-cluttering and simplifying, releasing emotions, highlighting what needs changing and clearing the way for the new. This applies whether you are man or woman, menstruating or not, so find a pattern or cycle that suits you and make regular time for letting go, sorting, simplifying, reviewing and clearing.

Flow or resist?

For men and women alike, what happens if you continue to go on “super-drive” all of the time with little time and space for a rest and recovery period? You get exhausted and burnt-out or get yourself another “sickness” that will serve the purpose of stopping you in your tracks and helping you slow down by giving you a hospital visit, pain, a “break”, depression, cancer or a heart attack, for example.

Alternatively, what occurs if you are in constant “rest and recover mode?” Lack of motivation, lethargy, weight problems, emotional outbursts, isolation and the list goes on.

When you resist, rather than go with the flow of your body’s wisdom and cycles, you keep holding on to stuff and don’t allow yourself to shed what is no longer useful. Nor do you top up your energy that will give you the momentum to create change. The balance is disturbed and your energy does not flow as well. Then you start seeing the symptoms of eg. endometriosis, polycystic ovarian syndrome, fibroids, premenstrual syndrome, seasonal affective disorder and other physical, emotional and mental health issues – all of which can ultimately impact your relationships, intimacy, family life and general enjoyment of life.

How do you resist going with the flow? Certain medication and means of contraception, holding on to emotions, un-forgiveness, overworking or inactivity, unwavering beliefs, trusting logic over intuition or trying to always be in control. What else can you add?

Integrating the lessons of the cycle

You may, or may not have menstrual cycles, but you can practise and on-teach “cycle” wisdom. Alternate the patterns of action versus inaction, work versus leisure, giving and receiving, and being strong and in control versus being vulnerable. You could also flow with some of these cycles:

Daily – regular breaks, sitting and standing, working and “non-working” activities

Weekly – some days off work, regular sport or exercise programme, Friday night special activity

Annual – celebrating special occasions, annual holiday or retreat, financial sort-out

Seasonal - winter review and retreat, spring clean, summer sun, autumn sorting and shedding

Lunar – follow the waxing (growing, blossoming, creating) and waning (shedding, simplifying, releasing) of the moon

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