

Menstruation Cycle

For someone with a uterus and ovaries, a period cycle typically lasts 28 days and has 4 phases: Menstruation, Follicular, Ovulatory, Luteal. Hormones direct each phase of the cycle and managing the ways a body experiences these hormonal changes can help support overall wellbeing.

The Phases

Menstruation - 1 to 7 days (Your body is having your actual period)

What is happening: The uterus sheds its lining (which is bloody) through the vagina. The blood can be red, pink, or brown; all are normal. The blood flow is heaviest the first few days.

How you might feel: Everyone experiences their period differently. Some people have cramps, others don't. You might have abdominal or lower back pain, a change in your appetite or sex drive, food cravings, and you might feel tired or fatigued.

Follicular - First 14 days until ovulation (Your body is preparing an egg for release)

What is happening: Your ovaries are getting ready to release an egg. You will have up to 20 eggs in pods called follicles. A hormone called follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) causes one follicle to grow stronger than the rest. The egg inside that pod matures producing another hormone called estrogen. Estrogen will cause your uterus to thicken preparing it for pregnancy.

How you might feel: You might experience a higher sex-drive, have more energy, and improved focus. You might notice vaginal mucus. This is an indication that your body is most primed for pregnancy.

Ovulatory - Around day 14 (Your body is most ready to get pregnant)

What is happening: The increase in estrogen signals to the brain to release another hormone called luteinizing hormone (LH). The LH makes the follicle holding the egg rupture, and the egg begins to travel into the fallopian tube. If the egg meets a sperm in the fallopian tube, there could be a pregnancy. If not, the egg will die within 24 hours and continue down the fallopian tube. The cycle will then continue to the 4th stage.

How you might feel: You might have cramps, breast tenderness, and light spotting or bleeding. Some people even experience minor pelvic or abdominal pain

Luteal Days 14-28 (Your body is readying itself to either be pregnant or start the cycle again)

What is happening: The LH surge that stimulates ovulation also prompts the creation of the corpus luteum. The corpus luteum is formed from the ruptured follicle and produces the hormone progesterone. If there is no pregnancy, the corpus luteum stops producing progesterone, the corpus luteum will be reabsorbed in your body and a signal is sent to the uterus to start shedding its lining, and you will get your period.

How you might feel: Fatigue, bloating, cramping, low back pain, headaches, constipation or diarrhea, food cravings, low libido, tenderness in your breasts or chest.

Support Your Wellbeing

Listen to your body, practice intuitive eating, and prioritize stress-management.

- If you are feeling low, drink plenty of water and engage in light movement to release endorphins.
- Eat leafy greens, omega 3s (fish, walnuts, eggs, supplements) and high fiber foods (lentils, beans, and vegetables). If you're in the energetic phase of your cycle (follicular, ovulatory), sustain your body with healthy carbohydrates (potatoes, vegetables, fruits, and whole grains).
- Journaling, meditating, talking to a friend or therapist, going for walks, and taking naps are all great ways to find balance.