THE HEALTHY HORMONE HORMONE NATUROPATH

YOUR HANDY GUIDE TO YOUR MENSTRUAL CYCLE

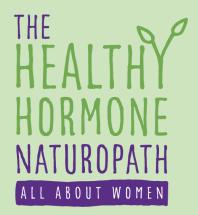


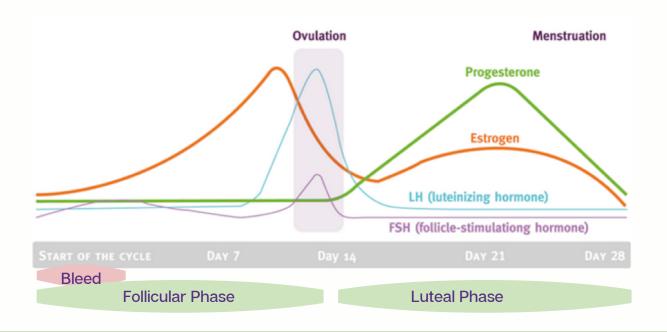
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This little book has been created to give women a quick guide to what goes on with their cycle every month, why hormones matter in overall health and what you can do to help keep hormones balanced.

This information is for general use only and is not intended as specific medical advice.

Your amazing menstrual cycle



So here it is - in all its glory. Our menstrual cycle. Absolutely magnificent.

The reason why we are 30% genetically different to men.

I love this picture so much because to me it represents that as women we are supposed to be cyclic by nature. It explains why our bodies can feel a bit different at the start of the month and the end of the month.

We are supposed to have ebbs and flows of hormones. It makes us who we are.

The picture explains a lot regarding the balance between hormones. Or as I like to say, the song that the choir is singing.

This of course is a "textbook" menstrual cycle and we are all different, but you can see quite clearly that there are hormones that should be in specific ratios to each other and should rise and fall at specific times of the month.

If they don't, that's often where we see problems such as irregular cycles, heavy bleeding, premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

Its also the reason that if you are getting hormone testing done, either saliva or blood, that it needs to be done at particular times of the month in order to establish what the levels are and if there may be an issue with the levels.



Meet your amazing hormones



Luteinizing Hormone (LH) –

Secreted by your brain is tells the ovaries when to ovulate. That is, it tells the ovaries when to release the eggs. It also plays a part in testosterone and oestrogen production.

Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) -

Secreted by your brain it stimulates the follicles in your ovary to grow. At the start of your period there would normally be a bunch of immature follicles and over the course of the first half of your cycle one dominant follicle will emerge which will eventually house the egg that is released in ovulation.

Oestrogen -

You actually have a bunch of different oestrogens produced by different places in your body. The one from your ovaries is called oestradiol and is where most of your oestrogen comes from so. (Oestrogen = Estrogen, Oestradiol = estradiol). Oestradiol is secreted by the developing follicle and increases as the follicle matures. Most things that you read that say oestrogen mean oestradiol.

Progesterone -

Is secreted after ovulation from the place where the egg grew before ovulation (corpus luteum). You cannot have progesterone unless you ovulate. Progesterone is the pregnancy hormone, it preps the body for a pregnancy.

Testosterone -

Is not shown in the picture but we still have it. Its mostly stable across the course of a cycle with a small increase around ovulation.

Prolactin -

Also not shown in the picture, it is the hormone that really kicks in when you have a baby and is responsible for the development of breast milk. Prolactin levels are present in women normally and tend to increase at the times that oestrogen does in your cycle but still should remain low in non-pregnant women.

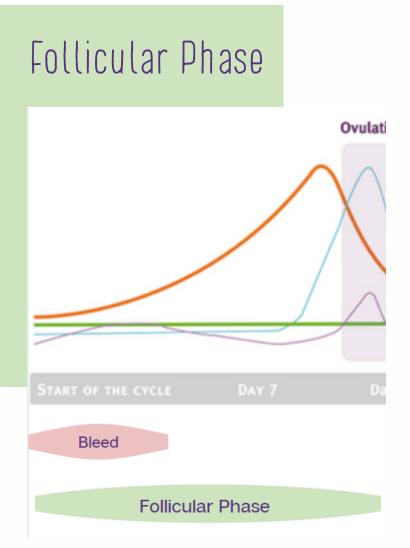
Through the month explained

Day 1 of a cycle equals the first full bleed day and you can see at the start of the cycle we are in the "low hormone" phase.

After you have finished your menstrual bleed your body starts to build up your uterine lining again and as oestrogen increases then this builds further.

As the days progress, a follicle is growing and becoming dominant and that explains the gradual rise in oestrogen in the first half of the cycle as oestrogen is released by the follicle.

When the dominant follicle has matured and oestrogen reaches a certain level, your brain registers this and this triggers a big spike in LH and a smaller spike in FSH which is what causes ovulation to happen. Just before the LH surge there is a dramatic drop in oestrogen.



Sometimes women experience ovulation pain and its thought that this might be related to an inflammatory substance that is released to allow the egg to burst out of the membrane of the ovary into the fallopian tube.

From Day 1 to ovulation is called your Follicular phase and is roughly 14 days.

Finally we have been getting some woman specific information regarding physical training and its effect on our body over our cycle and it appears that this part of our cycle is THE best time to build muscle. Turns out, our muscles LOVE oestrogen for growth. This really is your "go hard or go home" time if you are a gym junkie.

There are bunch of athletes that have reported their personal best times around ovulation. If you train – don't fear your period, it's the best time for performance growth.

Also turns out that in the first part of our cycle we can handle carbs at our best and have the most willpower when it comes to dietary choices. Food for thought – literally!

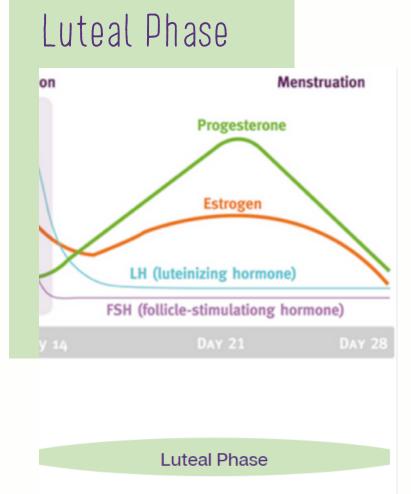
After your body ovulates, the space that the egg was released from in the ovary (called the corpus luteum) starts to secrete

progesterone and this builds over the next 7 days, peaking at about day 21.

Progesterone makes your uterus lining ready for pregnancy and if the egg was fertilised then progesterone levels would continue grow. Your body temperature rises at ovulation and stays higher while progesterone is present. That's why body temperature measurement can

be helpful if you are trying to figure out if you are ovulating.

After a drop just before ovulation, oestrogen starts to build again (it is also secreted by the corpus luteum). It also helps prepare the body for pregnancy.



If the egg is not fertilised then the corpus luteum starts to degrade and then levels of progesterone and oestrogen decline as this happens.

As they drop, this signals other body chemicals to be released to start to break down the uterus lining which ends as menstruation. Some of these chemicals are inflammatory so if there too much of these then this can contribute to premenstrual pain. Our body also releases an anti-clotting substance that help thin the uterus lining out so if you get lots of clots during your period it may mean you are bleeding faster than this anti-clotting chemical is being released.

It is usually the drop of oestrogen and progesterone that is responsible for premenstrual complaints, particularly if one drops quicker than the other. Sometimes our friend prolactin is a bit high here too and this can contribute to low moods too.

The Luteal phase is the time we call a "high" hormone phase.

The progesterone influences our fluid retention and we are more likely to feel a bit "puffy" across his time (drink water!). We are also likely to have less willpower over this time because of the changing hormones and would benefit greatly from NOT going hard in training and instead doing some yoga and stretching exercises.

The bottom line always is though - if you get pain and discomfort that impacts your life, or a cycle that is long or short, super heavy or super light, – this is NOT normal and would benefit from a professional opinion.

So what's normal?

Length

If you are an adult, anywhere between 21 and 35 days where;

- Follicular phase is from 7 to 21 days (although 21 definitely on the outer edge)
- Ovulation is one day
- Luteal phase lasts 10 to 16 days

If you are a teenager, then anywhere between 21 and 45 days (as your cycle is still establishing itself) where;

- Follicular phase is from 7 to 32 days
- Ovulation is still one day
- Luteal phase is about the same, 10 to 16 days

Stress, nutrition, age, or not ovulating can affect your cycle length.

Follicular phase can be longer but the luteal phase will not be more than 16 days.



Vaginal discharge

Its normal to have some discharge and it should be white or light yellow with a mild salty odour. If it has a bad smell or causes discomfort then you should seek help.

Fertile Mucus;

- Normally seen the days leading up to ovulation.
- Clear, stretchy and slippery as egg white consistency
- Important as it helps propel the sperm through the uterus to the egg





Pain

You should not lose entire days of your life to period pain.

Mild cramping is normal but if period pain is interfering with your life then you should seek help.

Some women experience minor cramping or twinging around ovulation as well.

Bleed



Duration of bleed - between 3 and 7 days

Flow about 50ml to 80ml;

 50ml is 10 soaked medium tampons or 5 soaked super tampons daily or, changing tampon or pad about every 2 hours.

Clots

There should not be too many as your body releases natural anticoagulants to thin the uterine lining as it breaks away. If you have a heavier flow then you may get some clots but they should not be many and shouldn't be more than about a centimetre.



Things that affect your cycle

Stress

Chronic stress results in persistently high cortisol levels - your "stress" hormone. Cortisol and progesterone are made from the same base chemical. If you are stressed your body goes into something like a survival mode and it will preferentially make cortisol as it is integral to the fight or flight reaction. Therefore, progesterone production is reduced and this can change ovulation and length of your cycle.

Cortisol also promotes fat storage in your tummy region. Fat cells are actually active organs that can secrete hormones. In this case they can secrete oestrogen which means that you get even more oestrogen, less progesterone which results in something called relative oestrogen dominance. Remembering that hormones should be in the right ratio to each other this can create some of those PMS type symptoms.

Think of it from an evolutionary point of view – our periods are all about the possibility of making a baby. Why would your body let you bring a baby into the world when it perceives that you are in eminent danger? When we are stressed for extended periods of time our hormone balance can change.

Nutrition



The food we eat provides the building block of all of our body functions this includes your hormones.

If you do not eat enough food for what your activity level is then your menstrual cycle will be one of the first things that will be affected as our body classifies your reproductive cycle as "non essential". All the nutrients will go to other functions to keep the body functioning and your cycle will suffer. This is also true for some women even when they eat enough but cut specific food groups out of their diet - like very low carbohydrate diets.

Similarly if you eat too much food or highly processed food this can affect your period. As mentioned, fat actually secrete oestrogen so this can change your hormone balance if you have lots of fat cells. Also processed food is highly inflammatory to the body so this can increase pain and PMS symptoms in women.



Toxic Chemicals

Its hard to get away from chemicals in the world we live in, they are everywhere. Carpet, furniture, drapes, personal care products, fire retardants, cars, plastics, clothes are just some of the many things that we are exposed to.

There are chemicals that have been banned for decades that still show up in our blood stream.

Researchers found that in the cord blood of newborns there were over 200 chemicals already, some of which had been banned for over 30 years and it is estimated that before they leave the house the average woman has applied about 126 different chemicals to theor face and body.

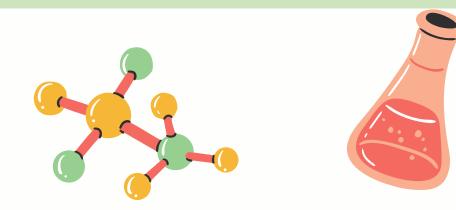
Why are they an issue?

Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals attach themselves to the part of the cell where the hormone should go.

When a hormone attaches, it is the start of a whole chain of reactions in the body but when the chemical attaches nothing happens and then it blocks the real hormone from attaching. This can mean two things;

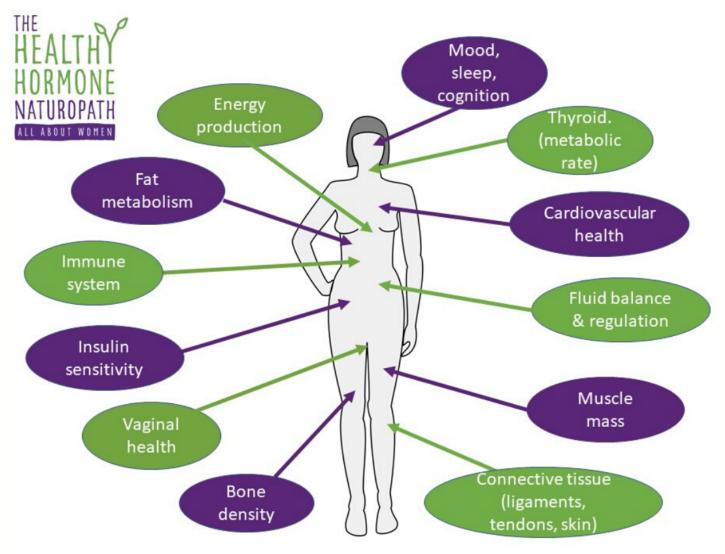
1. Your body doesn't function the way it should because a whole cascade of reactions don't happen that should.

2. You have all these hormones floating around your body that should have attached to something else. Too many unused hormones can contribute to lots of health issues PMS symptoms and in some cases hormone driven cancers.



Hormones are not just about making babies

Our Hormones influence...



Look there is no doubt that if you are looking to get pregnant then the balance of your hormones is important.

The thing is though, our hormones have a greater impact on the rest of our body than we give them credit for and when they are not balanced, they can have a whole-body impact. We have receptors for our female hormones, progesterone and oestrogen in nearly all of the areas of our body and whilst testosterone is usually always thought of as a male hormone, we have receptors for it too.

Our hormones influence the way our brains work, our mood, our sleep, our thyroid function (which controls your metabolic rate amongst other stuff), our cardiac function, the way we produce energy including how we burn fat stores, our blood sugar levels, our immune system, our vaginal health, how we build muscle, our bone density and our skin and connective tissue health.

Its why when they change in very significant ways, whether that be higher or lower levels then we feel it on a whole-body level.

If we take Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) for instance, a condition where often testosterone is higher, we see often see things like impaired blood sugar regulation, difficulty losing weight, acne prone skin and sometimes facial hair growth.

In Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS), which is often related to the drop in hormones just before a period or sometimes too much of a hormone relative to the others, we see things like bloating, irritability, moodiness, sleep difficulties.

In endometriosis, whilst not strictly considered a hormonal condition, we see the influence of hormones on the severity of the condition. Its interesting that with this condition there is increased inflammatory markers and often different immune markers too.

And menopause, where all of our sex hormones plummet, we often see whole body suffering by women.

Like I say, hormonal balance is a bit like a great choir. When all the singers are in the exact right pitch then the song is beautiful. If one of those singers are not in pitch then the song that comes just is not enjoyable!



The Healthy Hormone Naturopath -Wendy Burke



Hi there, thanks for checking out my book. I hope it gave you some great info to understand your cycle better.

I founded The Healthy Hormone Naturopath after a number of years in the Natural Medicine industry helped me realise that treating woman and their hormonal concerns is my absolute passion.

It just seemed to me that outside of Natural Medicine there seemed to be limited options available for women who were suffering because of hormonal imbalances.

And look, I'm happy to admit that I am a bit of a "I am Woman Hear Me Roar" kinda gal too.

I love the opportunity to educate and empower women about their health and specifically their hormonal health. Our hormones are such a big part of who we are!

Fortunately, I have a family that supports me in my passion and although my two boys (three if you count my hubby) keep me on my toes and sometimes it can be tricky juggling everything, they are the light of my life.

I came to the Natural Medicine industry quite late in life. Previously in corporate, my decision to change careers was prompted by my own health journey. Once a quite unhealthy person (I smoked, drank and ate pretty poor-quality food), I was prompted to change my lifestyle when I had post-natal depression after my oldest child. I started exercising and eating nutritious foods and over time this resulted in a markedly changed outlook on life and being 40kg lighter.

The change for me mentally and physically was so profound that I felt compelled to go and study Nutrition. I met some amazing Naturopaths at College so I also studied Naturopathy.

Along the way my love of exercise resulted in me getting my Personal Trainer qualifications too.

If I'm not researching, consulting or hanging out with family and friends, you will find me in the gym. I have a love of brightly coloured tights and probably have more than I really need!

My favourite things to help with are all things women and hormonal;

- Preconception & pregnancy
- Support for IVF
- Period problems including PMS
- PCOS
- Endometriosis
- Menopause & Peri-menopause
- Nutrition for optimal hormone health
- Finding the right diet and lifestyle for individual genetics
- Speaking and educating about all of the above

Need a hand? Get in touch.







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