



Your Cycle Decoded

Unleash your feminine power by understanding your cycle.

Phase 1: Follicular Phase

Phase 1 of your cycle begins directly after your period ends. At the beginning of the follicular phase, your hormones are in a quiet place, beginning to increase in concentration in the coming days. The small hypothalamus in your brain has the very big responsibility of kicking off this amazing process signaling your pituitary gland to shuttle follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) to your ovaries to help some of the eggs inside mature. Your two ovaries, which are each only about the size of a grape, contain your lifetime supply of eggs, each housed in a fluid filled sac called a follicle. Fueled by the arrival of FSH, the follicles swell in preparation. Estrogen levels begin to rise to initiate the renewal of your uterine lining- the endometrium, so that it can host an egg in an ideal environment later on in the cycle. On a behavioural level, the follicular phase is a time of beginning, a fresh start.

Foods to support this phase: think fresh, vibrant, and light foods such as carrot, lettuces, grapefruit, oranges, and pomegranate. Lean proteins such as chicken and trout and nutrient dense energy sustaining grains such as oats.

Phase 2: Ovulatory Phase

Over just a few days, a dramatic rise in estrogen, followed by a rise in luteinizing hormone (LH), stimulates one lucky follicle to mature fully and be released into one of the fallopian tubes. The egg diligently makes its way down the fallopian tube to the uterus where, thanks to rising estrogen levels, the uterine lining has grown lush and a host of protective immune system cells have sprouted. In conjunction with the LH that stimulates the follicle to release an egg, there is also a sharp surge followed by a rapid decline in testosterone. The ovulatory phase lives up to its popular reputation-it is a period of feeling social and communicative.

In the ovulatory phase, thanks to that surging estrogen, your energy levels should be high, and your mood should be stable. However, without the right dietary support, that surge may go too far and make you vulnerable to experiencing the symptoms of excess estrogen levels, such as acne. This is the “hottest” phase of the cycle because of the temperature change from ovulation, so you can sustain the rawest foods during this phase. Fill up on veggies (red bell peppers, spinach, tomato, leafy greens) and fruit (raspberries, strawberries) for their cooling effect. These foods are also packed with fiber which will help eliminate the estrogen. These foods also provide high levels of glutathione, a powerful antioxidant that will help your liver metabolize excess estrogen from your body more efficiently.

You do not need as many carbohydrates, so you can feel satisfied with lighter grains such as quinoa and corn. Ovulatory foods promote antioxidant support and provide vascular support for your ovaries so your body can create the healthiest egg possible. These foods will also ward off estrogen-driven symptoms, such as acne and bloating. By eating lots of fibre-rich foods in this phase, you are also supporting your large intestine to increase transit time and help flush out the estrogen that the liver is working hard to metabolize.



Phase 3: Luteal Phase

The corpus luteum (the follicle from which the egg was released) grows inside the ovary, sparking the production of progesterone. Estrogen levels continue to rise and promote additional padding of the uterine lining. The rise in progesterone signals the body to keep the thickened lining in place in anticipation of a fertilized embryo. The rise in progesterone signals the pituitary gland to stop the release of FSH and LH. Toward the end of the cycle, if the egg has not been fertilized, the corpus luteum is reabsorbed into the body in the utmost efficiency. After estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone reach their peak concentrations, they begin to fall to their lowest levels right before your period begins. (PMS is common-but completely unnecessary- part of this phase and results from too much estrogen in relation to progesterone.) Think of the luteal phase as a time of completion, when you are naturally inclined to finish projects and tie up loose ends- you begin to turn your attention on yourself.

In the luteal phase, your body needs more calories as your metabolism naturally speeds up during this phase. (200-300 daily) We also need more B vitamins to pump up the production of progesterone and to stabilize blood sugar levels. Not following these guidelines can trigger sugar cravings. To curb cravings, you need to proactively eat slow-burning carbohydrates (like brown rice or sweet potato) throughout the day and shift your diet to emphasize foods in B vitamins, calcium, magnesium, and fiber. Eat cooked leafy greens such as collards, mustard greens, and watercress which are high in calcium and magnesium to reduce fluid retention, something that affects many women in this phase. Consuming high-fiber foods like chickpeas, pears, apples, and walnuts will help your liver and large intestines flush out estrogen more effectively, reducing the effects of estrogen dominance. In the second half of the luteal phase when your estrogen levels dip, boost your intake of healthy, natural sugars, such as roasted or baked root veggies. Be sure to keep filling up on complex carbs, such as millet, to stabilize serotonin and dopamine levels and help prevent mood swings. Eating more nutrient dense foods that provide more calories in this phase will help prevent any energy dips during your period. The foods recommended for this phase offer another unexpected bonus- better bowel movements! The rise in progesterone during the second half of the cycle slows transit time and can lead to constipation.

Phase 4: Menstrual Phase

As the corpus luteum gets reabsorbed, progesterone production drops off in sync. This triggers your uterus to shed the endometrial lining. The consistency, colour, and duration of your menstrual period is a powerful sign of your hormonal health. Estrogen peaks and then plummets before the bleed starts as well, signaling your hypothalamus to get prepared for another beautifully rhythmic cycle. This is an ideal time for reflection and looking inward. Your hormone levels are at their lowest during menstruation, but you can compensate by increasing your intake of protein and healthy fats. Doing so will keep energy and moods stable while your brain adjusts to the downshift in hormones. Protein is rich in amino acids, which are involved in hormone synthesis. In addition, eating these foods now can help set you up for a healthier ovulatory phase next cycle. The reason is that dietary fiber intake has been linked to increases in progesterone and testosterone, and a reduced risk for ovulatory problems. It is especially important to turn your focus to nutrient dense foods during menstruation such as red meat, kidney beans, and buckwheat. Warming foods are ideal during this phase. Protein, fats, veggies, and fruits with a low-glycemic index-think blueberries and blackberries- keep blood sugar stable while adding antioxidants and fiber. Seafood, kelp, and nori can help re-mineralize your body with iron and zinc, which you lose during menstruation.

