

# Natural Support for the Menstrual Cycle

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# Natural Support for the Menstrual Cycle



Length, color, consistency, and symptoms – each woman’s period is unique. Many women go through their child-bearing years without thinking much about their cycle. Others tune into their body and recognize that symptoms like cramps, moodiness, headaches, or fatigue can indicate that the reproductive system needs support.

Understandably, these common complaints can cause women to feel less than enthused about their monthly cycle. But, while each woman and her period are different, there are some ways to support the body while it undergoes these natural changes. The endocrine system controls the menstrual cycle, and due to the intercommunication of all the endocrine glands, someone with reproductive complaints may also need adrenal or thyroid support. If you suspect this is the case, explore natural options and speak with a doctor for specific recommendations. In addition to physical care, it’s important to nurture a woman spiritually, mentally, and emotionally during this time.

Read on to learn more about supporting the body during menstruation.

## The Menstrual Cycle

First, let’s learn more about the menstrual cycle. Common cyclical symptoms include breast tenderness, headache, mood changes, food cravings, retained fluid, gas, bloating, and acne. Women seek help from practitioners and medical professionals primarily because of cramping, pain, and excessive flow. Expanding on information provided by Healthline<sup>1</sup> and Blackmores ([blackmores.com.au/](http://blackmores.com.au/)),<sup>2</sup> we will further discuss the menstrual cycle.



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A woman's cycle occurs in four phases:

**Menstruation:** Bleeding, cramping, and fatigue are common during this time. This phase occurs when an egg is not fertilized, which causes progesterone and estrogen levels to drop and the thickened uterus lining to shed.<sup>1</sup> During this phase, you may feel down and experience mood swings at the beginning of your period.<sup>2</sup>

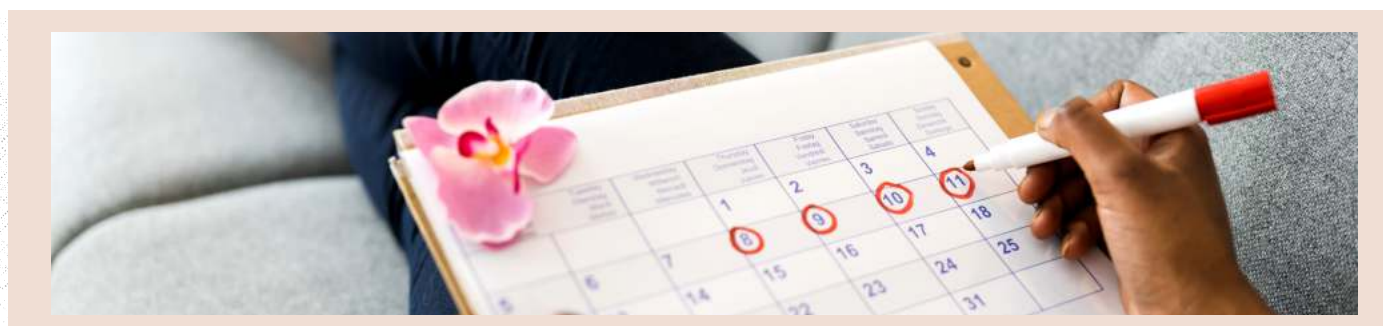
**Follicular Phase:** This phase overlaps with menstruation, beginning on the first day of a period and lasting for an average of 16 days. During this phase, follicles are produced that contain eggs. One, and rarely two, of the 5 to 20 eggs produced will mature. As this egg matures, it signals the body to produce more estrogen, thickening the uterus lining.<sup>1</sup> During this phase, you can expect to feel energized and clear-headed.<sup>2</sup>

**Ovulation Phase:** This phase typically occurs in the middle of a 28-day menstrual cycle. It is triggered by the body releasing luteinizing hormone. During this phase, the ovary releases the mature egg, and it travels through the fallopian tube to potentially be fertilized. If the egg is not fertilized within a day, it will dissolve or die.<sup>1</sup> During this phase, you may feel euphoric and notice happier emotions increasing.<sup>2</sup>

**Luteal Phase:** This phase is when classic premenstrual symptoms may occur, especially if there is an imbalance in the body. If pregnancy does not occur, progesterone increases, and all hormone levels decrease toward the end of this phase as the body prepares to shed the uterine lining. When the body completes this phase, the whole cycle begins again with menstruation.<sup>1</sup> During this phase, you may experience irritability, anger, mood swings, or brain fog due to a decrease in serotonin.<sup>2</sup>

## Supporting the Menstrual Cycle at Each Phase

Many people solely focus on supporting the body during the menstrual phase because of the uncomfortable sensations that can occur at this time. While this approach is understandable, regularly making healthy lifestyle choices is vital to helping reduce troublesome period discomfort or heavy bleeding.



It's also important to understand that reproductive concerns are generally tied to the overall function of the endocrine system. For example, the ovaries are connected to the thyroid and the adrenals through the Ovarian-Adrenal-Thyroid Axis. Thus, reproductive issues can be a secondary concern. General recommendations to support these glands include consuming a diet with lean protein, healthy fats, plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, limiting refined carbohydrates, adequately hydrating, and getting ample sleep.

The following self-care tips, provided by holistic dietitian Priscilla Gonzalez in an article written by Anya Meyerowitz in Red ([redonline.co.uk](http://redonline.co.uk)), can help to improve the menstrual cycle and assist in feeling better overall.<sup>3</sup>



## Support and Self-Care Tips for Each Phase of the Menstrual Cycle

### Menstruation Phase Support and Self-Care Tips:

1. Eat foods that contain magnesium, iron, and essential fatty acids.
2. Drink raspberry leaf or nettle tea to reduce cramps if needed.
3. Focus on rest and comfort. Get a massage before you begin your period to improve blood circulation. While on your period, rest and sleep as much as possible and consider diffusing calming essential oils such as lavender. If you need help sleeping or relaxing, try drinking chamomile or lemongrass tea.
4. Keep exercise light and targeted towards gentle stretching and practices like Qigong.
5. Hydrate yourself properly by drinking half of your weight in ounces of pure water. For example, if you weigh 150 pounds, you'll want to aim for 75 ounces of water each day.

### Follicular Phase Support and Self-Care Tips:

1. Eat whole foods that promote blood sugar balance to assist the body in producing an egg. Consume meals regularly to support balanced blood sugar levels further. Increase your intake of essential fatty acids and protein during this phase as well. If an egg is not produced at this time, then hormone levels may become imbalanced, leading to estrogen dominance.
2. Feel free to exercise as vigorously as you would like during this time!

*"It's also important to understand that reproductive concerns are generally tied to the overall function of the endocrine system."*

### Ovulation Phase Support and Self-Care Tips:

1. Stiffness may occur during this phase in your hips or lower abdomen. Reduce stiffness by engaging in hip or lower back stretches. Massage and acupuncture may also help with tension in these areas.
2. You may also feel warmer during this time and should expect your core body temperature to rise by as much as 0.5 degree. To counteract this feeling, consider placing an ice pack on your head or back and drinking plenty of water.

### Luteal Phase Support and Self-Care Tips:

1. Consume cooked meals during this time, focusing on proteins and healthy fats.
2. Avoid alcohol and caffeine during this time so that the body can retain its strength and energy. Alcohol and caffeine can deplete energy reserves, which can lead to worse premenstrual distress.
3. Prepare for your period by exercising lightly, slowing down, and resting as needed.

## More Self-Care Tips for the Menstrual Cycle

In addition to individual phase support, the Seed Cycling approach can also be helpful. The following information provided by [NourishedbyNutrition.com](https://nourishedbynutrition.com)<sup>4</sup> explains how Seed Cycling works. Seed Cycling aims to facilitate hormone balance, which is vital not only to the menstrual cycle but to overall health as well. During the first phase of Seed Cycling, you can support the body by consuming two tablespoons of pumpkin and flax seeds daily to improve estrogen levels and the ratio of estrogen to progesterone. Pumpkin seeds are high in zinc, which can help increase progesterone. Flax seeds have lignans, also known as phytoestrogens,<sup>5</sup> which are antioxidants that can bind to extra estrogen.<sup>4</sup>

During the latter half of the menstruation cycle, Seed Cycling entails eating two tablespoons of sunflower and sesame seeds per day. Both seeds help increase progesterone levels in the body. Sesame seeds also contain zinc and lignans that promote progesterone and stop excessive estrogen, while sunflower seeds are good sources of Vitamin E and selenium that help support the endocrine system.<sup>4</sup> In addition to Seed Cycling, herbs may also help with specific menstrual cycle concerns. For example, to help reduce stress-related feelings, consider ashwagandha, and to help increase energy, consider rhodiola as herbal support.





## Emotional Support During the Menstrual Cycle

Even with optimal lifestyle choices, additional emotional support may be beneficial. For example, Bach Flowers can be useful during the menstruation and luteal phases when you may feel down, irritable, and experience mood swings.

Consider the following Bach Flower remedies:

Beech- Helpful for certain types of irritation, feeling critical, or judgmental

Impatiens- Great support for those experiencing a lack of patience and need to slow down

Oak- A good match for those feeling overworked and who are dutiful

Elm- Wonderful for those feeling overwhelmed with an abundance of responsibilities

Walnut- Great with helping individuals to adapt to change

The Bach Flowers you choose will highly depend on your current feelings and state of mind. Therefore, you may find yourself using different combinations based on the feelings you're facing at that moment. To start, plan to have 3-5 Bach Flower remedies on hand that consistently resonate with you. To learn more about the benefits of Bach Flowers and which ones may be right for you, consult a Bach Flower practitioner to receive a unique blend recommendation.

## Conclusion

Having a period can seem like an inconvenience, but it doesn't need to be a painful or dreaded experience. However, if you do have significant challenges during your cycle, whether physical, emotional, or both, speak with your healthcare provider.

If you'd like to learn more about Bach Flowers, consider taking our Certified Flower Essence Specialist program taught by experienced instructors. To enroll in this program or one of our other 16 programs, call 800-428-0408, option 2, to speak to an Enrollment Specialist or visit [trinityschool.org/program/cfes](http://trinityschool.org/program/cfes).

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## References

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