



Empowered

Cycle Balance

How to Live With Balance During
Each Phase of Your Cycle

Living a daily life in support of our cycles can help our entire hormonal and endocrine system function more harmoniously. It's one of the best ways to give our bodies what it needs when it needs it, and to understand our bodies on a whole new level.

Each phase will have different needs or benefits in terms of brain energy, body energy, exercise, and food. Consciously supporting these 4 things helps to serve each phase of your cycle and will bring improved feelings of balance throughout your day, week, and month.

FOLLICULAR PHASE

Review of follicular phase hormonal cycle:

- The hypothalamus (control and command center of the brain) instructs the pituitary (the master gland) to release follicle stimulating hormone (FSH).
- FSH works to develop our egg follicles, with 1 dominant follicle "winning" the race.
- As this follicle gets bigger it releases more and more estrogen. Estrogen builds your endometrial lining and controls your cervical mucus production.
- Increasing estrogen changes our cervical mucus pattern from nothing to creamy lotion-like (non peak fertile mucus) to wet, slippery, egg-white like mucus (peak fertile mucus).
- Estrogen peaks at the end of the follicular phase.

Follicular Brain and Body Energy Cycle, Exercise, and Food:

- Body Energy:
 - Physical energy is increased during this phase and you may have a hard time sitting still, or notice increased feelings of restlessness
- Brain Energy:
 - Emotions during this phase are high - you feel outgoing, social, and refreshed. You feel most attractive during this phase so getting dressed up and going out is more exciting to you. Schedule dates, outings, and social gatherings during this time to match your cycle's energy
 - Working abilities are increased during this phase as well - your brain has more creative juice to pump out work projects, create new things, and be challenged. You find you have more stamina for projects during this time.
- Exercise:
 - With the increased energy and increased brain focus during this time, you may find a new type of exercise you haven't tried yet is appealing to you
 - Cardio, weights, and higher intensity workouts are appropriate for this time.
- Food:
 - Foods like avocado, artichoke, broccoli, carrot, parsley, zucchini, grapefruit, orange, lime, lemon, plums, pomegranate, tart cherry, green lentil, and cashews help to support this cycle.
 - Healthy fats help fuel healthy ovulation coming after this cycle

****Please note:** these foods are great for general overall hormonal balance so they can and should be eaten in other parts of your cycle as well. Integrating this part of cycle balancing means using less frequently eaten foods like pomegranates or artichokes at a time when they most benefit you. For you, this might mean that pomegranates are not a usual everyday food, but if you are going to add them in then this is the phase to do it!

OVULATORY PHASE

Review of ovulatory phase hormonal cycle:

- This phase lasts the length of your fertile window – from the presence of your mucus change to the day of ovulation. Usually around 3-5 days.
- When your estrogen peaks it stimulates a luteinizing hormone (LH) surge which stimulates the follicle to burst, releasing the egg.
- Cervical mucus pattern during this time includes the first non-peak creamy, lotion-like CM progressing into the wet feeling, and/or egg-white like CM.

Ovulatory Brain and Body Energy Cycle, Exercise, and Food:

- Body Energy:
 - You will feel increased arousal during this phase, as well as a need for connection.
 - You will also feel most attractive during this phase making it an ideal time to have a date night with your partner
- Brain Energy:
 - Better communicator
 - This can mean having deeper conversations with loved ones will be better received with your increased ability to communicate effectively.
- Exercise:
 - In connection to the follicular phase exercise and the increased energy you're feeling this is a great time to continue cardio, weights, running, or more intense plyometrics exercises. Again, we don't want to overly stress the body so 30-45 minutes of exercise is sufficient.
- Food:
 - We need to support our elimination and liver at this phase to ensure we are eliminating excess "dirty" estrogen adequately.
 - Lots of colors from a variety of fruits and vegetables plus your NAC are valuable here to help increase antioxidants.
 - Raspberry, strawberry, dandelion, chicory, brussels sprouts, escarole, spinach, pistachio, almond, red lentil, soaked and prepared quinoa, salmon, shrimp

LUTEAL PHASE

Review of luteal phase hormonal cycle:

- The normal length of a healthy luteal phase is 12-14 days. Getting pregnant is possible with a luteal phase of 10 days, but we ideally want it 12 days or more.
- After the follicle burst open and releases the egg it becomes the corpus luteum.
- The corpus luteum produces and releases progesterone, which helps to continue building the uterine lining and prep it for a possible implantation. While the corpus luteum continues to make progesterone it signals the body to keep the uterine lining in place.
- Several days after ovulation there is a slight increase in estrogen which might produce some cervical mucus for a brief time.
- If implantation does not occur then the corpus luteum is reabsorbed into the body, progesterone release stops, and the uterine lining will begin to shed.

Luteal Brain and Body Energy Cycle, Exercise, and Food:

- Body Energy:
 - You will notice a distinct lack of energy during this phase.
 - You may also notice you're feeling less attractive and more bloated.
 - Calm and comforting activities like relaxing on the couch, reading a book, watching a movie are desired in this stage
 - Going out and being social might be too tiring for your body at this phase
- Brain Energy:
 - Irritability, mood swings, headaches, and sweet/salty cravings will increase
 - Your brain has the need to start taking care of outstanding things and making to-do lists - this is the perfect time to clean out the closet, organize the kitchen cabinets, catch up on laundry, and take care of things around your home
- Exercise:
 - As you move out of the ovulatory phase and get a few days into the luteal phase you'll notice your physical energy has dipped. Some women notice this immediately after ovulation and some say it doesn't kick in for several days. After ovulation focus more on yoga, pilates, and walking rather than pushing yourself to intensely exercise.
- Food:
 - Cravings increase during this time as well as bloating. Foods high in natural B vitamins help with the bloating, while foods high in magnesium help with cravings. High fiber foods will continue to support your elimination of excess estrogen.
 - Cabbages, sweet potato, squashes and pumpkin, cucumber, collard greens, mustard greens, apples. dates, Great Northern beans (or cannellini), walnuts, cod, halibut.

MENSTRUAL PHASE

Review of menstrual phase hormonal cycle:

- Once the corpus luteum gets reabsorbed the progesterone level drops off and initiates the shedding of your uterine lining
- Day 1 of your period is counted from the first day of red flow that requires the use of a pad, tampon, or cup
- The body begins preparing all over again and estrogen will slowly begin rising again as you move through your menstrual phase. Those with shorter cycles may go straight into having cervical mucus as soon as their bleed is done. Those with longer cycles will have some dry days between their bleed and cervical mucus. Monitor CM every time you go to the bathroom every day and take note of your most fertile mucus of that day paying particular attention to the day it changes to more wet, slippery, egg-white like mucus (or if there isn't any, make note of that as well)

Menstrual Brain and Body Energy Cycle, Exercise, and Food:

- Body Energy:
 - You may be experiencing some pelvic or low back cramping as well as increased levels of fatigue
 - Building in rest time or nap time during these days helps your body move through this phase
- Brain Energy:
 - Intuitive ability is increased during this time so you may feel the need to start evaluating certain parts of your life
 - Your brain might be restlessly mulling over life decisions or this might be the time when you feel most worried or overwhelmed with things happening in your life - this is completely normal and part of this phase! Use it to check in with what's going on and use your increased intuitive ability to make a plan to move forward in your next follicular phase where you have increased energy.
- Exercise:
 - Rest time - this is when you may want to build time for naps into your day's schedule
- Food:
 - You're losing blood during this phase so focus on replacing nutrients with highly nutrient-dense foods that have iron, zinc, and a variety of other micronutrients. Beef, liver, mushrooms, beets, lobster, oysters, sardines, and crab.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USING CYCLE BALANCE

The best way to implement these cycle balance strategies is to look at your body energy and exercise first. Our brain chemistry is intricately linked to the hormonal messaging it receives. When we do things that go directly against the brain chemistry's hormonal signaling then this can cross some wires in our brain. Living outside of our natural hormonal patterns is a sign that our environment doesn't match our bodies needs and this can contribute to some hormonal imbalances and an "unsafe" message for reproduction.

While I believe in the power of understanding and listening to our bodies and living a balanced life, I also understand how difficult living to each one of these 4 categories can be. That's why I recommend to look closest at body energy and exercise and try to live most closely to these energies.

For instance, it will most support our brain chemistry to follow the cycle's hormonal cues for amount of exercise - more intense exercise in the follicular phase, less intense exercise in the luteal phase, and rest in the menstrual phase. This type of loving support for the body's hormonal energy preference is going to allow you to feel more connected to your body and cycle.

The food portion of cycle balance is not mandatory, and should not be used to restrict healthy, whole foods during any part of your cycle. It's more useful if, for instance, you're going to try artichokes for the first time. Maybe that's when you try it out at the follicular phase because that offers a benefit for that particular phase. Our Fertile Food Plan helps to cover your macro- and micro-nutrient needs on a high level, so that should be what we follow most closely.

In terms of brain energy, I find it to be helpful for my clients to know the normal thoughts and feelings that coincide with certain parts of their cycles. Understanding that the menstrual phase also normally comes with feelings of worry and overwhelm helps many women understand that this serves a biological purpose - instead of becoming anxious over these feelings, they can tap into the intuitive energy of this to actually find out what's really going on beneath the surface and make a plan to move forward.

The body is incredibly smart! All of our systems work together to provide us for the necessary energy so that we can feel balanced and connected in our lives and to our bodies. Use this information to help live in balance and not at odds with your normal hormonal cycling and the brain chemistry signals it's sending.