

Female physiology is very different from male physiology and training and exercise regimes need to make the most of these differences. The menstrual cycle is a big part of this and plays an important role in female health. However, few females, athletes, or coaches know much about it.

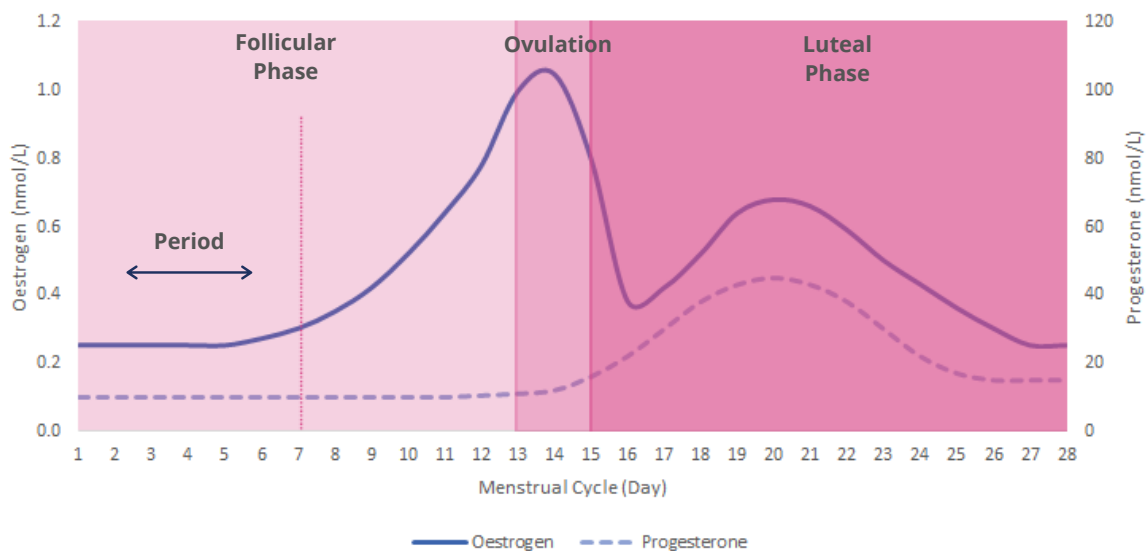
Why is it so important?

A regular menstrual cycle is a barometer of hormone health. The variation of hormones during the cycle is crucial to health and performance.

What does a regular cycle look like?

It varies from person to person but on average a cycle is:

- 26-35 days long (divided in to 3 phases)
- A period lasting 4-7 days
- Characterised by the rise and fall of the levels of the hormones oestrogen and progesterone



How does it affect me and my training?

Hormones travel throughout the body, so can have an effect on a range of different functions.

Recovery, Muscle Adaptation, Menstrual Cycle Symptoms, Sleep, Injury Risk, Immune System, Training

Types of irregular cycle:

Not all cycles follow the pattern above; this could be temporarily or more long-term

Types of irregular cycles	Symptoms	Prevalence
Amenorrhea	No period by age 16yrs ¹ or an absence of periods for 3+ months ²	<1% ¹ and 3-4% ²
Oligomenorrhea	Periods occur on irregular basis, <9 cycles per calendar year	13%
Premenstrual Syndrome(PMS)	Fluid retention, headache, fatigue, irritability	48%
Dysmenorrhea	Painful periods that affect the quality of life	28%
Menorrhagia	Heavy menstrual flow i.e. 7 days or more of needing to change a super pad or tampon every 2 hours or less.	3%

Stress, intense training, and under fueling (RED-S) can all affect the cycle and delay periods. Anyone experiencing any of the above symptoms should see a GP to rule out underlying medical conditions.

Tips for managing PMS

Family history, age, and stress levels can all affect how likely someone is to experience PMS. These can't be changed, but there are a few things that can be done to try and manage the symptoms:

- EXERCISE

If a high-intensity workout isn't an option, keep active with a light jog or yoga session.
- REST

Sleep can be disrupted due to an increase in body temperature around ovulation. Make sure there is an opportunity to rest and recover properly.
- HYDRATE

An increased body temperature might also mean a higher sweat rate at night and during training, pay close attention to hydration.
- FUEL

Fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and fish provide antioxidants, magnesium and omega 3, all of which can help reduce symptoms.
- RECOVER

A proper recovery routine will assist with the maintenance and repair of muscle mass.

What can we do?

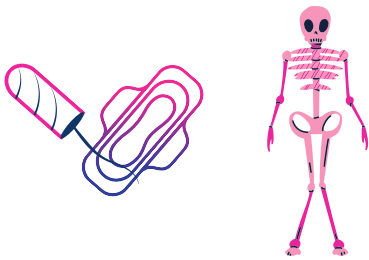


Talk - the menstrual cycle and periods are a normal and important part of female health; we should all feel comfortable talking about them.

Track - every female should keep a record of their own cycle. This allows them to notice any changes that might need attention.



Tailor - training programmes should take into account an individual's symptoms and the effects of the cycle.



A quick word on the pill...

The oral contraceptive pill changes a person's hormone profile and can mask problems with their hormone health without providing bone protection or addressing the underlying cause. Choosing to use the pill for contraception needs to be an informed decision.

Things to know!

- A regular menstrual cycle is a barometer of hormone health.
- Not starting periods by age 16 or not having periods for 3 months or more should be referred to a GP.
- Training should be tailored to the individual and their response. Energy levels, pain threshold, endurance, and strength can all vary with the phases, but there seems to be little effect on overall performance.
- The pill can mask problems with hormone health and choosing to use it for contraception should be an informed choice.

Want to know more?

For more information about specific symptoms or concerns, speak to a GP, Sport Dietitian or Sport Nutritionist.



Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S)
Signs of RED-S
Balancing Training, Nutrition and Recovery
Re-fuelling