



Female Athlete Education.

THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE : DEBUNKING COMMON MYTHS

1 "I shouldn't talk about my periods at training".

When it comes to our participation in sport we often talk about sleep habits, diet, and training, **but rarely our menstrual cycle**. But, to optimise our health, participation, and performance in sport, we need to **break this silence** and start to consider the menstrual cycle in the same light as these other functions.



6 "Everyone has a period every 28 days".

A textbook cycle might be 28-days, but we're not all textbooks! The length of a menstrual cycle (time from day one of bleeding to the day before your next period) is between **21 to 35 days** (and up to 40 days in teens). It is also 'normal' for menstrual cycle length to vary by up to 5 days cycle-to-cycle.



2 "I'm going to perform worse on my period".

There are **no evidence-based guidelines** for managing exercise performance across the menstrual cycle. Some athletes might notice a difference in their performance across their menstrual cycle, whilst others might not. The best advice for now is to **take an individualised approach** through cycle tracking.



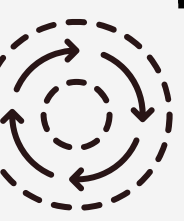
7 "Period pain and other symptoms are normal".

While some menstrual cycle-related symptoms are to be expected, **severe** period pain and other symptoms that impact your day-to-day life as well as performance and training should not be dismissed as 'normal'. **You don't have to train through the pain**. Speak to your doctor/GP for more information.



3 "I need to be training in line with my cycle."

Everyone is individual and some women might benefit from tailoring their training to their menstrual cycle phase, whereas others might not. Reminder: there are only 5 studies to date that have looked at tailoring strength training across the cycle, and no studies that have looked at endurance/combination training!



8 "I just have to get on with heavy bleeding".

Excessive heavy menstrual bleeding that **impacts your quality of life should not go ignored**. Heavy menstrual bleeding might put you at risk of iron deficiency and anaemia, and could be a sign of menstrual cycle dysfunction. Reminder: you shouldn't supplement with iron unless advised to by a medical practitioner!



4 "My cycle doesn't help me as an athlete".

While the inconveniences of menstrual bleeding and negative cycle-related symptoms might leave you feeling this way, your menstrual cycle is in fact **an indicator of health**. The sex hormones involved in your menstrual cycle are also important for the likes of bone and cardiovascular health!



9 "I should avoid exercise on my period".

There is **no evidence** to suggest that you should avoid exercise (intense or not) whilst you're on your period. In fact, exercising whilst on your period is **completely safe, and might also help you to manage some of the negative cycle-related symptoms** you might be experiencing at this time!



5 "Not having a period means I'm training hard!"

Red flag: A missing period or extended/irregular cycle length might be a sign of relative energy deficiency in sport (REDs) which could be a result of over-exercising, under-fuelling, or a combination of both. This might put you at an **increased risk of injury, illness, and underperformance**.



10 "It's ok to be 16 and not have my first period".

Yes and no. There might be **medical and other (training and/or nutritional) reasons for delayed menarche** (aka your first period). If you reach the age of 15 and a half and you haven't experienced your first period yet, then it's time to see your doctor/GP as they can clarify any uncertainty and determine why.

