

## 01. Understanding Your Menstrual Cycle



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

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# 01. Understanding Your Menstrual Cycle

If you are in the horrors with menstrual cycle issues, or you want to learn how to harness your hormones, then you are in the right place.

Welcome to the Period Power Podcast. I'm your host Maisie Hill, menstrual health expert, acupuncturist, certified life coach, and author of Period Power. I'm on a mission to help you get your cycle working for you so that you can use it to get what you want out of life. You ready? Let's go.

Hi there. You are listening to episode 1 of the Period Power Podcast. I'm recording this on day 15 of my cycle. And it's also my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday. I actually just put a post up on Instagram where I gave a list of so-called facts about the first 40 years of my life. But one of them was a lie. And so far, nobody's guessed the lie. So I thought I'd share them with you and then tell you the answer at the end of this episode. Let's see if you can guess the right one, here they are.

I used to work in a shop that sold exotic birds. I have walked down the aisle three times. I walked 54 miles in 24 hours along the West Highland Way in Scotland. Jimmy Page once asked me to take all my clothes off. I have a degree in the history of art and architecture in Africa and Asia. I was vegetarian for eight years. I was a tattoo apprentice. I taught Dave Grohl how to play rugby. Okay. Hold tight for the answer, it's going to come. And let's move on to the podcast.

Now, if you've read my book, Period Power, then you know I've got a lot to say about the menstrual cycle and how it impacts life. But what's going on in your life also shows up in your cycle. And I wanted to start this podcast so that we can really explore all of these topics. Because apparently a book that was 124,000 words wasn't enough for me to really explore these things.

So, I'm really thrilled that we're doing this podcast. And the podcast is for you whether you want to improve cycle-based symptoms, or you want to use your cycle to get what you want out of life. And believe me, I know

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what it's like to have menstrual cycle issues that stop you from living your best life or even just getting through the day.

I used to have debilitating period pain that would quite literally floor me. And I also know what it's like to contend with extreme premenstrual rage and irritability. Yep, I have had my own issues with my cycle. And that's what got me started with geeking out on reproductive health over 15 years ago.

Gosh, I can't believe it's been that long. And now I'm bringing all of that personal and professional experience to this podcast so that you can use it to great effect in your life.

This podcast is something that I've let percolate in me for well over a year. And I've used my cycle to figure out and create, until it got to the point where I was like, "Okay, you've done enough thinking. Now you need to start doing."

So, to those of you who've been asking for this for a while, thank you for your patience. I'm in the ovulation phase of my cycle. And I actually suspect that I ovulated yesterday as, along with some other key indicators, I feel a shift in my energy today. As in a shift in the amount of energy that I have, and the nature of my energy.

Now, if you're like, "What the hell is this woman talking about?" Then don't worry. All will be becoming clear because today I'm going to be demystifying the cycle for you. I'm going to be explaining it in a way that will help you to make sense of your cycle, whatever your particular experience is like.

I'm going to be covering some cycle basics. I mean, I say basics but so many people get stuck here. And it's really no wonder given that we rarely get the menstrual and sex education that we should. So, if you don't know these things it's understandable. Let's not go heaping shame onto

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ourselves for not knowing things about our bodies that have been kept from us. Okay?

First off, when I say cycle, I mean the whole of the menstrual cycle. That being the length of time from the start of one period to the start of the next period. This is often referred to as a 28-day cycle. But because many of you have a cycle that isn't 28 days, I don't like to describe it this way. Those of you with a cycle that's on the short side usually want it to be longer. And those of you with a cycle that goes on and on and on usually want it to be shorter. Me talking about a 28-day cycle isn't going to help, it's likely to add to any worries that you already have. So I won't be doing that.

Now, colloquially, some people will say that they are cycling when they are bleeding. But technically a cycle is not a period. Whenever I refer to a cycle, I mean the whole damn thing. The length of time from one period to the next.

Day one is the first day of your cycle, and it's also the first day of your period. Now, I get a lot of messages from people asking me what counts as day one. So, in case you're wondering that, here you go. It's the first day that you experience significant blood loss. It doesn't matter what time of day. Okay?

Now, from day one until you release an egg at ovulation, you're in the first half of your cycle, which is referred to as the follicular phase. It's called this because each egg is housed in a follicle. And in the first half of the cycle your follicles grow until one follicle dominates and releases an egg at ovulation. Then, from ovulation until the start of your next period, or pregnancy, you're in the second half of your cycle, AKA your luteal phase.

Now, we can break the cycle down into smaller phases. And that's something I'll be getting into in future episodes. But for now, I just want you to understand the two halves of the cycle. That's because how we think,

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feel, and act is often different in each half of the cycle. And understanding why this may be the case for you is going to make a massive difference to your life.

This comes up time and time again with my clients. Whether they're in my online community, the Flow Collective, or working with me one on one. It also tends to come up with conversations with people in the street and when I'm doing my shopping. So, I'm pretty sure that it will be coming up for you too. And I want you to have a simple point of reference to return to whenever you're trying to understand what's going on.

Now, because I want to keep this as straightforward for you as possible I'm going to be making some sweeping generalizations. And because I'm going to be oversimplifying this, I have to tell you something upfront. What I describe may or may not reflect your experience of your cycle. The timing of events in your cycle and how you feel may be slightly different, or very different, to what I'm about to describe. They may be different to your BFF's or sister's experience of their cycle, or for that matter mine. That doesn't mean that yours is wrong. All it means is that you have a unique experience of your cycle and your hormones, and that's true of every person with a cycle. Okay?

So, let's take a moment to stop and think about what the ultimate aim of the cycle is. It's reproduction, right? The menstrual cycle and our hormones benefit us in all sorts of ways. But I think that we can all agree that the main purpose of the cycle is to end up creating a new human being. Its aim is for you to conceive and reproduce, regardless of whether that's something we actually want or not. That's what it's there to do.

So with this in mind let's think about the events of the cycle and what's going on with our hormones and how they impact both our internal world and our external behavior out in the world.

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Remember, this is all about our behavior syncing up with what's going on inside our bodies in order to make a human. So, at the start of your cycle hormone levels are low, which along with any menstrual symptoms you might experience whilst you're bleeding, can help to explain why you might not have much energy and maybe want to hide away from the world.

Then estrogen gets going. And I like to think of estrogen as our Beyoncé hormone. Confident, alluring, sexy and ready to conquer the world. Estrogen wants us out there in the world, on the lookout for someone to mate with. And as you move through the first half of your cycle, estrogen is increasing and peaks just before ovulation.

So, how do we see this showing up in behavior? Maybe you can't sit still and get your work done. That's because estrogen wants you to be out in the world. Listen, your body does not know about swiping left and right. As far as your body is concerned it's thinking that it's unlikely that you're going to find a human to mate with when you're sitting at your desk.

So it wants you to move. It wants you out walking around, strutting your stuff, looking for someone to hook up with. Perhaps you're also more talkative because usually we talk to humans before we mate with them. Although, I mean, it's been a while since I went out on the town, but I'd say that isn't always the case.

Moving on, maybe you've got some sass going on. Maybe you're feeling a bit flirtatious. Again, this all helps with the typical human mating strategy. Our behavior is helping us to take advantage of the fertile window in the cycle when conception is possible.

And this might be stating the obvious, but I'm going to say it anyway. It's not that you can't or won't experience these, let's call them states of being, at other times in your cycle. Though for some of you this may be the one time, or one of the times in your cycle when you feel and act this way. There are also other ways that these behaviors can be harnessed that

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have nothing to do with procreation. But today we're keeping our focus on reproduction.

Now, in the days before ovulation, testosterone also shows up and can increase energy, motivation, and sexual desire. Again, all to help you go find a human and have sex with them. Then, just like that, you ovulate.

Well, it's not just like that. It's an incredible and intricate process but we're skipping that science lesson for today. So you ovulate and there's a drop off in hormone production. All that estrogen and testosterone takes a nosedive. I can't tell you how many of my clients have experienced significant relief simply by understanding this.

Think about it, one day you're pumped full of estrogen and testosterone and maybe you're living your best life, feeling on top of the world. And this is when I'm all, "Someone hand me my Wonder Woman outfit because I can totally rock some spandex right now." And then the next day, all those hormones are pretty much nowhere to be seen. And in this kind of situation, you could find yourself doubting the decisions and actions you took in the previous days. Feel depleted, and lacking in motivation, asking yourself, "What the hell happened to Wonder Woman?"

Now, not everyone will feel this drop off as acutely as this. For you it may be more subtle, or you might even feel better because of it. But I speak to so many people who beat themselves up with negative chatter inside their heads because one minute they were smashing it and the next they could barely make it out the door. Understanding why this happens means that you can go easy on yourself, which is always a good thing.

So, let's take a moment to orientate ourselves with where we are in the cycle now. We're post ovulation and in the second half of the cycle, the luteal phase. Hormone levels are low initially. Then estrogen starts to rise again.

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But the hormone we're more concerned with in the second half of the cycle is progesterone. Progesterone is your pro-gestation hormone. It's produced as a result of ovulation, which is why it's there in the second half of the cycle. Progesterone's main job is to support conception and pregnancy, though it does lots of other great things for your body too.

Now let's talk about how progesterone shows up in your cycle. I'm basically just going to say, it slows you the fuck down. Whereas estrogen is all, "Get out there in the world. You're amazing. Look at how hot you are. Go show everyone how amazing and how hot you are. And have sex while you're at it." Progesterone is all, "Hey girlfriend, you better take care of yourself now that you're knocked up. You can't be going out in that big old dangerous world. You got to keep you and that baby of yours safe. Best stay at home and relax. And hey, why don't you get some extra calories into you and eat something? We've got an extra mouth to feed in here."

Okay, I hope you realize I'm just having fun with this, but you get my point. In the run up to ovulation your hormones want you out in the world. And in the second half they want to keep you safe. So, in the second half of the cycle you might be more interested in your internal world more than the external world.

Knowing this means you can understand why you might feel less inclined to be social. Or perhaps why you're only interested in being social with those who are closest to you. I'm laughing because this may be the point in your cycle where you're actually desperate for a break from those closest to you, especially those that you live with during lock down.

But progesterone has a calming effect on the nervous system in most people. Though some people, like those with premenstrual dysphoric disorder, PMDD, might respond to it differently. But, for the most part progesterone chills you out. And it often improves sleep too.



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So, my top tip for this part of the cycle is to prioritize sleep when progesterone is peaking. Which if you do have a 28-day cycle, progesterone would likely peak around day 21. So we're talking about the days around that time. Basically about a week before your period is due to start, whatever the length of your cycle is.

This is when you're likely to fall asleep quickly and sleep deeply. And I really recommend taking advantage of that rather than going out on the town. Not that anyone is actually doing that right now.

Then, just before your period starts your hormones decrease. This is the day or two before you start bleeding. When you might feel particularly sensitive and exposed because of the hormonal drop off that happens. In my experience this is a great time to hibernate.

When you have this knowledge of the cycle you can make sense of what your cycle is like. Yes, you can also make adjustments where possible to your schedule. But even without taking that kind of action this information will change your experience of your cycle because, let's say you're close to ovulating and you can't concentrate on your work. Maybe your body feels a bit antsy. You'll be able to recognize that this is your body trying to get you to take a walk and find a mate.

And then when your energy slumps at the points in the cycle where hormone levels are low you know that it's because your hormone levels are low. Okay? It's pretty simple, right? But it's pretty effective. Knowing this makes a difference. No more beating yourself up because you feel less productive or less inclined to hang out with others.

So, can you see how powerful just knowing this is? How this knowledge will increase the level of compassion that you have for yourself. I'm really into increasing self-compassion, and it's a theme we will return to repeatedly on this podcast.

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But that's just about it for today my friends. Remember, when it comes to understanding the cycle, keep it simple. Get a sense of where you're at. Are you in the first half or the second half of your cycle? Are your hormone levels low or are they soaring? And how are they impacting you? Do you want to be out there in the world or laying low?

Okay, now I'm not going to leave you hanging. I know you all want to know the lie. So let's go through these.

I used to work in a shop that sold exotic birds. This is true. I used to live in New York in my early 20's and I worked in a parrot shop, or store as Americans would say, in the West Village.

I have walked down the aisle three times. This is true. I have been married three times, to two people. Neither of which I'm currently in a relationship or married to. Let's save that for maybe never.

I walked 54 miles in 24 hours along the West Highland Way in Scotland. This is true. I think we actually did it as a team in about 22 hours. It was something called the Caledonian challenge, which was one of the best things I've ever done.

Jimmy Page once asked me to take all my clothes off. This is true. And no, I did not.

I have a degree in the history of art and architecture in Africa and Asia. This is the lie. I actually started this degree but I didn't finish it because I ended up moving to New York instead.

I was vegetarian for eight years. This is, as you now know, true.

I was a tattoo apprentice. Also, true, part of my New York story.

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And I taught Dave Grohl how to play rugby. This is true. And yeah, that was a lot of fun.

So that is it for today. Thank you for tuning in and have a beautiful day.

To celebrate the launch of the show I'm going to be giving away three annual subscriptions to my amazing online community, The Flow Collective. Where I coach our members, host webinars, and interview special guests. That means three lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review the show on Apple Podcast will win an annual subscription.

It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I do really hope you love the show. But I want your honest feedback so I can create an awesome show that provides tons of value.

Visit [maisiehill.com/podcastlaunch](https://maisiehill.com/podcastlaunch) to learn more about the contest and how to enter. I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of the Period Power Podcast. If you enjoyed learning how to make your cycle work for you head over to [maisiehill.com](https://maisiehill.com) for more.