

04. Patriarchy F*cks Up Your Cycle



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Maisie Hill

Period Power with Maisie Hill

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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 folks, this is episode four because yesterday was the day that my podcast launched. And I really want to take a moment to thank you for your overwhelming support. You've been talking about it on social media, sharing it left, right, and center. Sending me lovely messages. And doing the all-important subscribe, rate, and review. Which really makes a massive difference in the world of podcasting. So, thank you to all of you who've taken the time to do that. It really means a lot.

And very excitingly I woke up today to discover that the podcast is at number 34 in the charts, which has just blown my mind. And I'm thrilled that it's going down so well.

And, oh, I can't forget to let you know this, before we get into things today, I want to invite you to a free masterclass that I'm hosting on the 28th of January, so later on this month. Where I'm going to be taking a deep dive into how to actually track your cycle. And I recommend coming along to this whether you're completely new to working with your cycle, or if you've been tracking in some way for a while.

So there's an earlier version of this that's a bonus for the members inside my online community, The Flow Collective. And we get feedback all the time about how folks find it incredibly helpful, even when they've been tracking their cycle in some way for a while. But this is an updated webinar and it's actually part of the new Harness Your Hormones course that I'm creating for inside the membership.

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But I want as many of you as possible to work with your cycle so I recommend that you sign up at maisiehill.com/masterclass and get this part of it for free. The link will be in the show notes, but just head to maisiehill.com/masterclass and you can register for it easy.

And I also want to give a special shout out to Nicola Marvin. So, Nicola got in touch a while ago saying that she wanted to buy some copies of *Period Power* to send to some of her friends for Christmas presents and was there a way that I could sign them? So, we figured out a way to do that. And Nicola bought them from the Margate Bookshop here in, well, you guessed it, Margate. And I popped in to sign them, back when I was allowed to do that kind of thing. And when I say them, I mean 21 copies. So, shout out to Nicola and your friends. Aren't you lucky to have such an amazing friend?

And also shout out to the Margate Bookshop who, by the way, do take online orders and they can post them to you. And I'd really love it, those of you who want to buy my book, if you can do it through them or through another independent bookshop. Just remember you can still leave reviews on Amazon even if you buy them that way.

So, I'm guessing that if you have read my book *Period Power* or you follow me on Instagram then it won't come as a shock to you when I say that patriarchy F's up your cycle. Some of the ways it does this are more obvious than others. And today I wanted to touch on the more explicit ways as well as the more subtle. I might get a bit ranty. On day 22 over here, so let's bring on the rants.

So female reproductive health, you all know is underfunded and under researched. There is a huge disparity between the number of hormonal and reproductive issues, the number of people with them, and the amount of funding and research that goes into them. And I would say that those statistics that we do have are likely to be on the low side given how many people have not received official diagnosis.

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And this is where we get into the lack of education that healthcare professionals receive. I speak to so many people who, if their experience of their cycle were to be trusted would receive a PMDD diagnosis.

So, PMDD, premenstrual dysphoric disorder is a hormone-based mood disorder that's related to the menstrual cycle. And the international guidance is that cycle tracking is the only way to diagnose it. Yet, so many people are told that they don't have it because their hormone levels are "normal".

So, we have two issues here, well, there's probably more but let's just say two. There's the lack of education about PMDD amongst healthcare professionals and the fact that women and people with periods are not being trusted when they share their experiences. We also see this during perimenopause, some of my clients have been told that they can't possibly be menopausal when they still have periods. Despite the fact that they're experiencing many signs and symptoms of perimenopause.

And when we're referring to menopausal symptoms, they actually usually start when you still have a menstrual cycle. This isn't something that suddenly happens. For some people it will be once you stop getting your periods. Often these symptoms occur way before your periods actually stop.

Okay, I told you I was going to get a bit ranty today. And I'll continue with that rant. Denying someone's experience is dangerous. When women and people with periods don't feel listened to you know what they do? They stop involving medical professionals and that is a problem. Yes, I am aware that medicine is patriarchal and a lot of the time lacking when it comes to reproductive health issues. And I certainly wish it would get up to speed with our actual needs and our desires. But I'm still a fan of medicine and I think it's a good idea to involve your doctor.

There are certainly some incredible doctors out there who are excellent clinicians when it comes to reproductive health. You might have some

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thoughts and feelings about the care you receive, or don't receive as might be the case. And the treatment strategies that are available to you, or lack of them. But I still think that being in conversation with your doctor is a good thing. I'm sure we'll return to this topic in more detail, but that's my standpoint.

But many practitioners do not receive sufficient training in hormonal and reproductive conditions. And often these issues are only deemed worthy of investigation if you're trying to conceive. Because if our ovaries and wombs are going to be used in a reproductive capacity then all of a sudden, they're worthy of investigation. But not if it's "just for you". This approach really baffles me and I think it's quite prevalent. But it's like there's more value in an as yet uncreated human's life than the person who's struggling, and I'm just not on board with that.

So, next up we need to talk about how we are rarely educated about our own bodies. Think about the impact of this. From the time we start ovulating and menstruating most of us have no idea what's actually going on and without that knowledge how can we understand and name our own experience?

So, a couple of years back I posted a photo of my fertile quality cervical fluid stretching between my fingers. And there was this whole thing where Instagram took down the photo. I reposted it explaining that they'd done that to the original. And the Huffington Post got a hold of the story and ran a really great piece about it and magically the photo reappeared.

Now, what was interesting about it is that I heard from several women who had Masters and PHDs in human biology who had no idea that cervical fluid that looked like that was both healthy and normal. So, if those being educated in human biology at a high level don't know these kinds of things then what hope is there for the rest of us?

And some people actually messaged me to say that they thought fluid like that was a sign of infection and they'd been treated multiple times using

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antibiotics et cetera. And they were astonished to learn that nothing was actually wrong.

But my point is that when we have little or no information about the cycle it remains something that happens to us and that we have no agency over. We have to defer to professionals who we are led to believe know more about our own bodies than we do. And, as I said, there are many health professionals who are committed to reproductive healthcare and do an excellent job of providing that care. Not everyone will have a positive or a satisfactory experience with their healthcare provider.

We are also taught that our bodies are dangerous and likely to betray us by going wrong somehow. The menstrual cycle is rarely framed as being of benefit to us. Or as something that can have a positive impact on our lives. And of course, medicine sees the male body as normal, the female body is different and certainly unreliable. And it's likely that if you were socialized as female you will have internalized these messages, that your body can't and shouldn't be trusted. That it's liable to go wrong.

Then, there's all the unpaid work and emotional labor that we are socialized into believing is our responsibility. And it's not. And if you want to just give yourself permission today to not do those things then please go ahead and do that.

So, they are the more obvious things than can impact your cycle. Lack of research, lack of funding, not enough access to treatment strategies, and we can probably add in ineffective or undesirable treatment strategies too. And everything I've mentioned so far is, you know, just if you're white, able-bodied, you're straight, and your gender matches the one that you were assigned at birth.

Imagine what it's like if you're considering or trying to access cervical screening if you're non-binary, or intersex, or trans. And just as an FYI the team at 56 Dean Street here in London offer a range of services for non-binary and trans people and their partners. They are incredible, just an

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outstanding team. So, do check them out if you want to access gender neutral reproductive health. And The Eve Appeal, who are an amazing charity have some great information on their website for those who are trans, intersex, or non-binary, as well as some guidance for healthcare professionals who provide services such as cervical screenings

Or how about if you're black or brown? We know that black and brown people have a very different experience of healthcare compared to white people. My clients who are black or brown usually have a very, in fact not usually, they always have a very different experience to my white clients. And this has nothing to do with the level of education or income that they have. We know that those things do not protect against healthcare disparities. And systemic racism also contributes to many reproductive health issues. So there are multiple additional layers that can be added to this.

Now, for some other ways patriarchy can mess up your cycle. It's a long list folks. What I would say is that everything I've mentioned so far comes up in my work with my clients. But what's coming up next is the heart of the work I'm doing a lot at the moment.

I'm talking about people pleasing, impostor syndrome, being a perfectionist, having subtle boundaries, not being able to say no, not being able to take naps, not taking care of, really, quite basic human needs because you're putting the needs of others first. Or even your imagined needs of others first. Like, are you actually an expert at taking care of others without them even asking for your help?

And what's common about all of these things is that they're all tied up with patriarchy. Because when you're socialized as female, you're taught to be nice, to think of others, to not be too much, to not be a bitch. You're taught that your worthiness is based on what you do in the world, what you do for others in the world. And let's add how you look to that list too.

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We're taught from very early on that our role in life is to make other people happy, to put other people first. Whether that's thinking their opinions and feelings matter more than our own, or taking care of other people in ways that just end up being detrimental to our own wellbeing.

These all impact the cycle and are very common themes among my clients. Most of whom are pretty hard on themselves. They're critical, as in they talk to themselves in ways that I hope they wouldn't allow anyone else to speak to them. And are prone to rushing their way through life because on some level they're trying to prove that they're good enough and worthy. Now, all these things are a perfect storm for hormonal imbalances and reproductive issues.

Not to mention plenty of resentment, frustration, exhaustion, irritability, and anxiety too. Because when you people please and lack boundaries you're likely to spend a lot of time ruminating on situations and feeling pretty pissed off. You're also likely to work during the times when you could do with resting and sleeping. Whether that's related to specific points in your cycle or in general, Basically, you're not going to do a great job of taking care of yourself.

And if you're trapped by perfectionist thinking, believing that there's a right way to do things. Or impostor syndrome, that everyone will find out that you're not who they've been led to believe you are. That everyone will think the worst of you and all of a sudden, your world will fall apart. Then tendencies like these will also muck things up. Because when you're thinking these kinds of things then your nervous system is going to be in fight, flight, or freeze. And that has consequences for hormone production and reproductive function.

Think about it, reproduction is not an essential physiological process. Yes, reproduction is important for a species to survive. We have to pass on our genes, we have to create other humans to continue as a species. But when you're in a stressful situation your body isn't that fussed about whether you are ovulating and mating.

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Instead, your body is busy getting blood to your heart so it can pump blood and deliver oxygen to your muscles because they're definitely going to need it if they're going to put up a fight or do a runner. And your liver is busy releasing glucose so that your muscles have energy to do just that.

And this might sound dramatic, but it is. But the thing is that your body has no idea that your boss is just another human saying words unless you direct it to think that way. As far as your body is concerned it thinks your boss is a saber-tooth tiger that it's got to somehow deal with or get away from. And when your brain has perceived a threat to your very existence, guess what's not important. Digesting what you ate for lunch and reproducing.

Your body is in let's just get through this mode. It's not interested in reproduction, because right now it just wants to survive. So, it diverts blood from your digestive tract and your reproductive system and other non-essential functions going on in the body. And it shunts the blood towards the places that need it.

Not to mention production of hormones and how stress hormones can compete against your other hormones by occupying hormone receptor sites around the body. This is why after many years of treating reproductive and cycle-based issues as a practitioner I trained as a coach.

I saw the same issues coming up time and time again and again. And whilst I know that I can use treatments to improve things like period pain or help to regulate someone's cycle, improve their mood and energy, you know, all the good things. I started questioning where I was creating the most impact with my clients.

So, there are numerous ways in which patriarchy impacts the cycle. But one final way I want to talk about this is in how it shows up in my relationships with my clients as their coach And I would basically summarize it as them not seeing themselves as the expert in their body.

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This comes up a lot and I think I'm really trained to see it because the decade or so that I spent working as a birth doula. Which if you don't know what that is it's basically being professional birth support. Nothing medical, doulas offer emotional and practical support during pregnancy, birth, and the post-natal period.

And by the nature of the job when you're working as someone's doula you can really see the times when they trust themselves and when they don't. And you also see the impact of that on them in the short term and the long term. And by the way, this has nothing to do with how someone actually gives birth or anything like that. What I'm speaking about here is all to do with where their head is at during the process.

And I also see it in my work now as a coach. Many of my clients come to me because they want me to tell them what to do and give them a perfect formula that's going to make everything all right. And it's completely understandable. They've usually read my book and have already positioned me as more of an expert in them than they are in themselves.

But they don't get a formula, that's not how I work. Don't get me wrong, I could do that, and sometimes there is a place for a specific recommendation. But, it's not in their interest that I tell them what to do. Why? Well, first up, coaching is not about telling people what to do. But also, because if I were to indulge in, I'm going to call it egocentric behavior, which positions me as the expert in someone's life rather than themselves. Then that person is then reliant upon me for solutions.

And anybody who knows me will tell you that I don't like to feel relied upon. This really is a "it's not you, it's me" situation, but it's also for their benefit. It's pretty much universal among my one-on-one clients and my clients in The Flow Collective that there are issues around not trusting their bodies. Not trusting that they already know the answers, when most of the time they do.

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And yes, we do need information in order to make sense of our experiences, right, I'm not discounting the need for that. Or the need to hire experts to help us figure things out sometimes. Education is everything, because when you know what your body is up to you can make sense of your experience. If you haven't listened to episode one yet, Understanding Your Cycle, make sure you do.

But my job as their coach is to help them explore their thoughts and feelings so that they can make powerful decisions for themselves and take action. And I do that by asking questions so that they can access their own insights, wisdom, and solutions.

When I suggest a course of action to a client, which I do from time to time, it's usually because I have a sense that they're thinking small and I want to offer another option to their brain to see what happens when they see what's really possible for them. And it's always hilarious to watch what happens. I get to see their mind being blown but they also get to watch where their brain goes too. So, it's a really fun process.

And I do this knowing that patriarchy has taught us to stay small, to think small. And I want to change that. And a really great way for you to do that is to start working with your cycle. So that you cannot just improve your cycle and learn how to take care of yourself in a really profound way but also so that you can use it to create the things you want in life.

So, don't forget to register for the cycle tracking masterclass by going to maisiehill.com/masterclass. And you can get cracking with it, okay? Thank you for listening today. I will catch you next time.

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.

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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 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 for more.