

09. Bleeding Better



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. Are you ready? Let's go.

Hi folks. We are on episode 9 already and that means that on next week's episode, episode number 10, I will be announcing the winners of the competition that's been running to celebrate launching the podcast. So if you haven't entered yet it's not too late, just go to the link in the show notes and you'll get all the details of how to take part and enter, and all you need to do is leave a review and use the submission form that you will find the link to in the show notes. And there are three annual memberships to The Flow Collective up for grabs. So it's well worth entering.

And the other thing that I want to let you know about before I forget to tell you is that I am going to be doing a listener Q&A episode soon. So if you have a question that you'd like to ask me, just head to the show notes again, there will be a link there that you can use. And you can submit your question and I'll be selecting some questions to answer in a future episode not too far away.

And before we get onto today's topic of bleeding better, I want to take a moment to give a shout out to the members of The Flow Collective because I really want to acknowledge and celebrate them. The theme that we've been working on throughout February is self-love which sounds really nice, doesn't it? It's like yeah, that's a lovely theme. But as some of the members have been mentioning they've realized that they've had quite a superficial idea of what self-love is. And what we've been doing has definitely at times been confronting and challenging.

There's been tears and realisations but they are in there being very courageous and willing to show up and do the work for themselves which I

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just think is such a tremendous act of self-love in itself. And I'm thoroughly impressed with where you are all going with this theme, so a shout out to all of you.

Okay, let's crack on with today's episode which is all about bleeding better. And I suppose it's good to start off with just clarifying what I mean by bleeding better. So for me bleeding better is literally about having a better experience of bleeding whatever that happens to look like for you. So you're all going to come at this from different angles depending on where you're at with your period. And I've been thinking about this topic for a while. And ended up going a slightly different direction with today's episode than what I initially set out to do. And I'll explain that as I go along.

But whenever I'm coming up with a concept or thinking about something that I want to explain I really like to take the time to think of certain clients and particularly members in The Flow Collective. And really think about how what I'm working on would apply specifically to them.

And as I was doing that in preparation for this episode it struck me that the different angles that I was considering actually correspond to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which you may have heard of, you may have not heard of. And I am definitely not an expert in this psychological theory. But it really, as I was working on the episode I just noticed that it corresponded quite well to it. And I thought it serves our topic for today really well, so I'm going with it.

But for those of you who don't know, basically this psychologist dude, Maslow created this five tiered pyramid of hierarchical levels of needs. So on the bottom of the pyramid there's physiological needs. So that means things like food, clothing, shelter. And then when you move up to the next level on the pyramid he put there safety and security, and then the middle layer is love and belonging and then second from the top is esteem. And then right at the top of the pyramid is self-actualisation, which basically means reaching your full potential.

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So Maslow's original theory was that starting at the bottom of the pyramid your needs need to be met or fulfilled basically in one area in order for you to move up the hierarchy. And apparently he later clarified that it's not linear like that, but I've been playing around with his hierarchy of needs in regards to menstrual health. And today I'm going to be giving examples that are specific to periods. But you can really apply it to all of the cycle. You can play with it as much as you want to.

Hopefully I'm giving you a good starting point and a slightly different way of understanding your needs when you're bleeding. So I'll give you the quick version of this which is that there will be some of you listening to this episode who would just be really happy and very much relieved if you had less period pain, or if you didn't faint or vomit when you are bleeding. Or maybe if you didn't flood through your clothing, that that would be a great thing for you.

And when you have physical symptoms like these that you're really desperate for some improvement with, you probably care less about using your period to tap into your creative genius. And if you're anything like I was, just the mere suggestion of that might result in you wanting to punch someone in the face just for suggesting it as a possibility. Because where you're at is on that base level of the pyramid.

So let's take a deeper dive with this and start off at the bottom of the pyramid. Physiological needs, physical needs, so those of you who do have significant or severe period problems your focus when it comes to bleeding better is likely going to be really just about feeling better physically. A reduction in your symptoms is going to be what would make a massive difference to you at this moment in time. And if I could just wave a magic wand you'd be thrilled with the impact of that. If we could just take away your cramps, or your heavy flow, or whatever else you might have going on.

And I totally get this because this is where I used to be at too. And those of you who have been following me for a while you know my history. I used to

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have a horrific period pain, it was severe, and excruciating, and really impacted my life in lots of ways. And when I was bleeding I would be running scorching hot baths at three or four in the morning to try and deal with the pain because the painkillers that I'd taken had worn off overnight. And I also found things like hot water bottles really helped me. I would just be like give me all the heat to take away the pain.

But because the period pain I had was so full on sometimes I wouldn't realise that I was actually burning myself with the hot water bottle. And I remember one of my friends chastising me in kind of shock and horror because for two months in a row I burnt myself across my lower abdomen. And I had blisters all across my lower abdomen and pubic area because the hot water bottles were just so hot but I didn't realise that they were burning me because the internal pain from the period pain was so severe.

And if my period started when I was out and about, particularly this was before maybe I was paying so much attention to the dates of my cycle, or I would just forget about it. And I'd be out and about and I'd start bleeding and the pain would be so full on I'd just need to lie down somewhere until I could get it together enough to get home.

And back then if someone happened to mention to me about how their period was a time of great creativity for them or maybe if they just didn't have any issues at all I would just look at them like they were an alien. That was just so far removed from where I was at. Because what they were talking about was more to do with what was going on at the top of the pyramid, when we were going back to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. That's more to do with the self-actualisation part that involves creativity and reaching one's potential.

I was absolutely at the bottom of the pyramid, floored on the bottom of the pyramid just begging for some kind of physical relief. So if that's where you're at I get it 100%.

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Above physiological needs we have safety and security. And when I think of this in relation to periods I think about the environments in which we bleed. Are they safe for us to be in when we are menstruating? And stop and think about this for a moment. Does it feel safe for you to be someone who menstruates in your place of employment or maybe even your own home?

I know that one of the benefits of lockdown life is that for some of you being at home working from home has made it a bit easier for you to be someone who has periods because you can use a hot water bottle and you can work in comfortable clothes, or your pyjamas, or take a hot bath, things like that. But I think it's really helpful no matter what your situation is to stop and consider what would need to change in order for you to feel safer in these environments.

And safety might be a huge issue for you if you're trans or non-binary and have periods because just the act of using a public bathroom during your period could be very unsafe for you, very physically unsafe. And another way we can think about this is job security, does it feel safe for you to take time off when you're menstruating or does it feel risky for you to do so? And some of you would probably love to be able to take some time off because of your period symptoms or your cycle based symptoms.

But maybe you worry about being passed over for promotion or maybe think that that could end up making you first in line for a redundancy. So you push on through when really if your needs were being taken care of and the systems were in place for that to be possible then you wouldn't push on through and you wouldn't feel like that's something that has to be done.

And these fears are very real, this is an area that I think about a lot, especially as I have my own business and a personal goal of mine is to hire more people as my business grows and to really demonstrate that it's possible to run a successful business that doesn't just consider employees'

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health needs but the actual reason the business thrives is because we prioritise the cycle, and self-care, and rest, and other areas of health.

And as I was preparing for this episode I was really thrilled because last night just as I was about to read over my notes for this episode I was having a scroll on Instagram and I came across a post that Bloody Good Period had put up. For those of you who don't know, Bloody Good Period is an amazing charity that provides menstrual products to those who can't afford them as well as providing menstrual education to those who are less likely to access it. They do amazing work and I will include the link in the show notes if you want to check out their website, make a donation, you can also sponsor a period which is a really fantastic way of supporting their work.

But to return to their Instagram post this post was all about periods and menstrual wellbeing in the workplace because they've carried out some incredible and much needed research around this topic. And you can imagine my delight, not just because it's fantastic that they've done this, but because it very neatly ties into what I wanted to talk to you about today. And I'm really happy that I can give you some actual statistics and research around this. So a shout out to Bloody Good Period, you are all amazing.

And what I want to share with you is the key findings from their research and I am going to be quoting in the following sentence is directly from their Instagram post so you can go find it yourself, go check out all of their amazing stuff. 33% of participants in the research felt that it's more professional not to mention their menstrual health to their employer. A quarter believe that taking time off work for menstrual health issues had negatively affected their career progression.

More than a quarter, 27% of those surveyed reported never feeling supported by their employers with the youngest respondents feeling the least supported. A shocking 4% of respondents said that they never have free access to toilets and breaks. And an additional 11% said they do only

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sometimes. And when asked what employers could do to help, 63% said to normalise the conversation around periods in the workplace.

And the report calls for employers to take action on improving their knowledge, understanding and empathy around periods at work. And this research comes ahead of the summer launch of Bloody Good Employers, their new programme which will help employers to play a more active role in the conversation around menstruation and improve the support they offer to employees who menstruate.

So if you are an employer or you're keen to address this in your workplace then please do go and check out the full report. It's available now. And keep an eye on this upcoming programme because I mean this would just change so much. So, please do go check it out. But beyond this we can look at what's going on externally and that is so important. But I also think it's good to just check in with your internal level of safety and security. And consider your experience of being in your body.

Do you feel safe and secure in your body? And it may well be that if you are prone to things like heavy bleeding then you don't feel safe and secure in your body because maybe you're thinking I can't trust my body, or things along those lines.

Moving on to the middle layer of the pyramid which is where we have love and belonging. And there's a couple of ways that I like to think about this. The first is do we feel that sense of belonging in our bodies whilst we are bleeding? And if the two layers before this, the physical needs and the safety and security, if those needs are being met then I do think it's more likely that you will experience that sense of belonging in your own body.

But when we talk about belonging we usually mean do we feel accepted as a member of a group? So that might be your friendship group, your family, your romantic relationship, and in relation to your period I think about this layer certainly in terms of relationships and group dynamics. And the themes that I think we could tie in here that you might consider are

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friendship, acceptance, trust, affection. So stop and think for a moment about your period and a sense of belonging. Do you have any experience of feeling accepted by those around you as someone who menstruates?

And are you able to communicate about your experience of bleeding with those who are close to you. That might be your friends, your kids, your partner, it might even be colleagues. I know some of you are really on it with showing this kind of information in ways that feel safe to you with some of the people that you work with. I have a client who's just done this in a really courageous and incredible way. So just think about any of these relationships. It could be loved ones but it could also be other people around you.

And think about what goes on around the time of your period. Are those close to you able to acknowledge and accept whatever's going on for you? Is it okay for you to retreat and then re-emerge if that's what you need to do or if that's what you want to do? Are there people around you who can share in your experience of having a period and having a cycle even if they don't share the same experience as you?

And this is what I see happening in The Flow Collective, that there's folks on there who are just so thrilled to have a dedicated and safe space, where they get to experience that sense of belonging. And they get to bring all of their stuff to do with their cycle, and to do with their lives, and to be accepted and experience that sense of belonging.

And I think, you know, I've been thinking about these layers in relation to my experience with my cycle and how my cycle has changed over the years. And the different things I've had to work on. And this middle layer was an interesting one for me to work on for a while in my 20s and early 30s the romantic partners I had were unable for whatever reason to meet me, and see me, and accept me whilst I was bleeding and in pain.

And I was thinking about this and I can remember a time when an ex, well, when we were together when we went to visit a friend who lived on the

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other side of London to where we lived. And it was a Sunday and we had to take a bunch of trains to get to my friend's place. And I was already bleeding at this point and this friend would not have cared one bit if I had just sent a message or something and said, "Look, I'm bleeding and in pain and I just want to stay put." But for whatever reason I decided that I was going to push on.

So please pay attention when you find yourself doing the same. Anyway I just pushed on, got the first couple of trains and I remember having to change a platform in order to get the final train to get to her stop. And somewhere in southeast London, I can't remember where. And my painkillers wore off whilst waiting on a packed platform for a very full train. And I was in agony, I was just in bits. And my partner at the time was just horrified. And I mean my interpretation in all honesty of his reaction was that he was disgusted. And that's completely my interpretation.

But the point I think I want to make here is that I didn't feel met in that experience. And there was another time when I just had to lie down on a pavement somewhere and I was with my then partner. And I asked if he could call a cab so that we could get home and he just kind of commented that it was only a five minute walk. I mean literally I was lying down on the pavement. And then when we did get back he also commented on the amount of hot water that I used in the bath to try and get some pain relief.

And I was very opinionated about this at the time and I'm guessing that as I'm saying this you'll be having your response to me sharing this too. And as tempting as it is to focus on my exes what I want to speak about was what was going on for me because as much as we can talk about them what I want to focus on is that I was so in the habit of isolating myself and just getting through it.

And that was really the mentality that I was in, that a lot of the time I actually wasn't acknowledging my own needs or prioritising them. And I certainly wasn't communicating them in the way that I would now let's say. And being very honest with you, I think also in hindsight I can see that I

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was just wanting these partners to rescue me somehow. And all of these things they're very human, they're very understandable. But the way I look at those experiences now is that I wasn't taking care of myself and I was putting that responsibility onto them.

So I have really looked at what was going on with me internally at that time and worked through that. But at the same time of course I want to look at the socialisation of boys and men, and the taboos, and attitudes to the menstruating body and to the female body. And from that place I can absolutely uphold a higher standard of what is acceptable and desirable for me in a relationship and what I want in terms of change on a societal level. And it also means because I've really looked at this and I think it's really interesting, I think actually this middle layer is where I did the most work.

It means that now I can make requests and ask for what I want from a very clear and straightforward place. And I'm able to communicate what's going on for me and make those requests without drama. It's just like it's very clear, it's very straight, very upfront.

And just as a side note I once met a woman, it must have been just after my book, *Period Power* came out who told me that she takes my book along to every first date that she goes on. So that when her date asks her what she's reading she can pull out my book, *Period Power* and use it as a way of filtering out the people that she wouldn't want to continue to date. And I just think that is genius.

So I fully endorse that idea, if you're interested in really testing the water from the get go on a date and seeing if this person is going to be up for having conversations about this kind of stuff. Feel free to use my book.

Anyway let's move on from talking about my exes and move up to the second layer from the top, esteem, which we can think about as encompassing respect for yourself, respect from others, admiration, confidence, strength, self-belief and personal and social acceptance too. And when I think about this I'm reminded of when I used to make excuses

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around the time of my period, particularly the first couple of days when I was really in pain. And this is very different to how I talk about my period and my cycle now.

And at this point in time I was in my mid 20s. I had just started working as a practitioner and the pain was horrific. This is when it was at its worst. And on those days there was no way I'd be able to treat my clients, no way. And so I just used to cancel on them and say that I was ill and make up excuses. And then as I started to work on my physical needs, that physiological layer, the bottom of the pyramid and I was reducing my pain. And then on the second layer of the pyramid I was also feeling more secure in my new role as being self-employed and being a practitioner.

And I was also experiencing more security in the relationships that I had with my clients as well. So I started to feel able to speak up about what was going on for me. And it was a bit of a crossover time because it started out that was when I just couldn't work on those days. But then my pain started to improve but at that point I would choose not to work on those days. So I could have at that point but it also felt like I'd be pushing it. So I decided to prioritise me and rest as much as I was able to.

And I would say that when this was going on this is when I felt secure enough with my work that it didn't feel as risky to say to a new client, "Yes, I'd love to work with you. But if our treatments fall on these particular days then I won't be able to treat you", and to explain why. And for some people of course that wasn't acceptable, that wasn't what they were up for. But others were so intrigued by my approach and really appreciated that I was being upfront with it and modelling this way of doing things for them.

So to go back to this layer being about esteem I would say that yes there were examples there where my clients really respected and even admired what I was doing. And that I was communicating that upfront with them. And I was able to do this because my other needs were being taken care of to the degree that enabled me to feel that I could be more vocal. And I felt more confident and able to offer other people around me a way to

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recognise and appreciate my cycle and how I was choosing to experience it.

So I felt good about what was going on. I didn't need permission from others whereas I think previously I felt insecure about needing to take time off. And I felt a lot of negativity around it. But then I got to the place within myself where I accepted and respected what was going on. And I knew that in an ideal world I would have some time off. I wasn't always able to do that by the way, but a lot of the time I could manage it. But because I got very clear on that for myself I was then able to share those choices with others.

And certainly this is going to depend on the context in which you work and the environments and the systems in which you work in. But it's just really interesting for me to look back and see those changes because now I will tell people that I barely know important nuggets of information about my cycle. Because it just seems weird for me not to share those things, particularly when it's helpful to the work that we are doing together, that kind of thing.

Now for the top of the pyramid, self-actualisation, so this is all about realising your potential and we can think about personal growth and self-fulfilment. And also I think particularly when we're talking about periods I think we can include creativity and self-expression here as well. And as I've already shared, when I started to experience this with my periods, me myself, I was just astonished because it's so far away from the experience of the majority of the periods I had had up until that point where things started to really shift.

And now when I have my period I could actually work as normal and sometimes I do. And I could parent as I normally do because I don't have that pain. There isn't a physical symptom that prevents me from going about my daily life. But for me I do personally find it's important to modify the things that I usually do because I'm prone to feeling depleted. And I can end up quite wiped out if I don't watch it, particularly at the start of my cycle. So there are things that I modify.

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I won't pick my son up. I mean he's about to be five, it's a struggle to lift him up and dance around the kitchen like we used to, to Whitney Houston. But when I'm bleeding I'm definitely not going to be doing that. And that's a conversation that I have with him and I say, "I'm bleeding at the moment. I'm not going to lift you up." And other things I might do is not walking a long distance, that kind of thing or just maybe working from bed instead of sitting at the desk.

But I think the main reason that I like to safeguard, I think that's a good word to use, safeguard the first couple of days of my period is because that is a time now that I'm not riddled with pain. That I often come up with great ideas, and ways of explaining things especially if premenstrually there's been stuff that I've been kind of tussling with. And kind of doing some quite deep thinking around but maybe not getting to a place of resolution with it where everything clicks into place.

But then when I start bleeding it's like things do suddenly settle into place and I experience a level of clarity and also a connection to my purpose and path in life. That's very strong for me when I'm bleeding. So I don't want to miss out on that. I try and create space for it and really all that means practically is that I sit in bed thinking about things and then scrawling them down and working at my laptop and really just downloading the stuff that is in my brain.

And at the moment there's really only so long I can get away with lying down and doing that kind of thing before someone in the household is hollering for me. I say someone, it's always my son. It's not my partner. But for me it's important to prioritise that time for myself.

Okay, so that is my riff on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs when it comes to periods. And if this is resonating with you I'd love for you to just do an inventory of where you're at. Think about the pyramid, you can always pull it up on Google and get that image up for yourself, but think about that base layer, that foundational layer. Are your physical needs being met when you're bleeding? Moving up the pyramid, do you feel safe and secure

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when you're bleeding? Do you experience a sense of belonging as someone who menstruates?

Do you respect and honour yourself when you have your period, and do those around you? Are you able to tap into your period for personal growth, expression and creativity? Then take a moment to come up with one thing that would make a difference to your experience of bleeding because I reckon you already know what would help you to bleed better. And if you want to, feel free to head over to the dedicated posts that I will be putting up on Instagram and let me know because I'd love to hear your thoughts.

Okay folks, I will catch you next week.

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 Podcasts 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 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.