

## 12. Listener Q&A 1



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

**Period Power** with Maisie Hill

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

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.

This is episode 12 of the Period Power podcast and today is our first listener Q&A episode. So many of you submitted questions and there were some really great ones. I wanted to just answer them all. So thank you for taking the time to send them in. It's been very hard to pick which ones to go with. But what I've done is gone with the most common questions that were in there.

But before I get onto answering them I need to announce the winners of the competition that's been running to celebrate the launch of the podcast. Again these were also hard to pick so I ended up using an online random number generator thing that randomly selected the numbers. So here are the winners. First we have Amy Ryden, then Elena Spafford and Bianca James who have all won annual memberships to The Flow Collective. And we will be in touch with you shortly by email with all the details. Congratulations.

And I also want to take a moment to thank you all for the support you've shown me over the past few weeks in the run up to Perimenopause Power coming out. I'm recording this the day before publication day so it's out tomorrow which gives me all the feels right now. I am feeling quite emotional today. And it just feels really quite surreal that it's actually happening. This book has just been written behind closed doors so it feels – it's just been a very different quite bizarre process compared to writing Period Power.

But I'm really grateful to all of you for all the support that you've shown me and you've been talking about the book across social media and it really

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

makes a difference. And it's amazing to know that it's going to be in your hands tomorrow. Well, actually by the time you're listening to this you'll have your copy. So just remember wherever you bought it you can always leave a review on Amazon. You don't have to have bought it from there to leave a review there. And reviews make a big difference.

Okay, let's crack on with these questions. Here is the first one. So this person shared, "I'd like to track my cycle and symptoms but I'm currently taking a contraception pill three weeks on with one week off. Do I follow your advice about tracking from the first day you bleed? As according to my pill packet I would be day 23 in my cycle." So I get asked about all cycle tracking whilst on the pill a lot. So I was really thrilled to receive this as a question.

So you can absolutely track your energy and your mood etc whilst taking the pill. I always think it's helpful to be paying attention to how we think and feel. And some of you do tell me that you've noticed a relationship between how you feel and the lunar cycle. So you may be having an experience along those lines. But if you're taking the combined pill then you won't actually be experiencing a menstrual cycle because one of the ways the combined pill works is by suppressing ovulation.

So when you take the pill you don't actually have periods, you have what's known as withdrawal bleeds during the time when you don't take the pill, or the patch, or maybe when you're using the placebo pills in your pack. But this person didn't mention what type of pill they're taking.

And if you're taking the progesterone only pill which isn't actually progesterone but that's what we call it, it's also called the mini pill. Then according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, four in ten of you who are taking progesterone only pills will continue to ovulate whilst you're taking them as although it can stop ovulation it doesn't do so consistently.

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

But don't get freaked out, it also has other mechanisms of action when it comes to preventing pregnancy such as thickening your cervical fluid up, which makes it harder for sperm to enter your uterus and fertilise an egg if you did happen to ovulate. And it also thins the lining of the uterus, the endometrium, making it unsuitable for a fertilised egg to implant. So in answer to your question, you don't need to wait until day one to start tracking. You can do that on any day. But if you're on the pill you probably won't be experiencing a cycle. So that's question number one.

And staying with the topic of hormonal contraception, I got quite a lot of questions about what happens if you're using the hormonal coil, the Merina IUD, or technically it's called an IUS. So I had a few different questions or repeats of the same kinds of questions. So they were along these lines. The first question was, "If you have a Merina hormone coil and you don't bleed anymore do you still have a cycle? I did my first month of cycle tracking but didn't know exactly when to start because I don't have a real period anymore."

Someone else asked, "I don't menstruate but feel like I do experience a hormonal cycle." This is whilst using the Merina. And another question was, "I have a Merina for medical reasons, which has completely stopped my bleeding, which was the intention of using it. Is it still possible to track my cycle without bleeding as a reference point?" So let's get into all of these kind of together.

So first off, the Merina IUS can inhibit ovulation. One, one year study found that 45% of cycles in the first year following insertion were ones where ovulation takes place. And another study found that after four years of it being inserted, 75% of cycles were ovulatory, so ovulation would take place in those. And this may be related to the dose of progestin, the synthetic progesterone that's in it. Again the Merina doesn't rely on suppressing ovulation in order to prevent pregnancy. It has other mechanisms of action too.

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

So yes, you can still experience a cycle whilst on it but you may not have a period because periods can lighten with its use because of decreased blood flow to the uterus and because it also thins the lining of your uterus, the endometrium. So with all that in mind I think it's worth tracking your energy and mood and seeing if there's a pattern because quite a few of my clients have been able to uncover it and figure it out. But you don't need to start on a particular date. And the sooner you get started the more data you'll have to go on, and that's the main thing.

Okay, next question is, "Why do I get headaches or migraines after my period? Tracking has helped me realise that they are cyclical but it doesn't make them any easier." So I love that this person has noticed an association between their headaches and their cycle. It's a great starting point.

And when headaches appear towards the end of a period or after it finishes I think of end menstrual migraines which are headaches or migraines that are related to your cycle. But they aren't caused by changing hormone levels which is what we'd be thinking of if we were talking about the appearance of them pre menstrually. End menstrual migraines are related to low ferritin levels. So ferritin is a protein in your blood that stores iron.

And it seems that headaches and migraines towards the end of your period or after it are related to a brief relative anaemia that occurs because of the blood loss you have whilst you're menstruating. And in Chinese medicine we would call this blood deficiency which is really a more expansive way of looking at things rather than just straight up anaemia. So just know that it's a thing.

Okay, next up, so this person says, "I've been doing the cycle tracking chart that you recommend in your book for the last few months and it's really giving me lots of interesting insights into my cycle and mood. But I find it difficult to differentiate between my spring and summer. What are the key differences between these two phases?" So I was coaching someone in The Flow Collective on this the other day and a lot of the other members

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

had a similar experience to what you've mentioned. So just know that you're not the only one.

And for me personally I would say it's the least distinct seasonal shift. And for those of you who haven't read my book, *Period Power* and don't know about the seasons of the cycle, here's what they are. So around the time of your period is when you're in your winter, after that you're in the pre ovulatory phase, which is your spring. Around the time of ovulation is your summer and the premenstrual phase is autumn.

And this amazing way of understanding and approaching the cycle was pioneered by Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer from Red School. And their book, *Wild Power* is incredible. I was fortunate enough to do an apprenticeship with them some years ago. And I can't sing their praises enough, so do check them out. So that's what the seasons of the cycle are if you didn't know. And in answer to this question, firstly I would ask why you need to be able to differentiate between them?

I know that might sound like an odd place to start. But I think it's always useful to just take a moment to check in on why. Of course it's nice to know and it sounds like you've been approaching cycle tracking with an air of curiosity which is a great approach to take. But have a think about what difference knowing this will make. Again, it's not to say that you shouldn't be able to or shouldn't want to but I think it's helpful to take a moment and just examine why.

The other thing to mention is that I find that spring and summer are the seasons of the cycle where if you're feeling pretty good, not everyone will at these points. But if you are feeling pretty good then cycle tracking can end up being de-prioritised on the data which says you might have lots of things to say. But if you're feeling okay then maybe cycle tracking just isn't a priority. And that makes sense because oestrogen's just going woo hoo, party time. But who wants to write down how you feel? How boring. Just go out and get laid, that's what's going on hormonally.

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

So you may because of that have less data to go on because your brain is going to other places. And when it comes to being able to discern between the two seasons it can be very subtle. So you really need to be paying attention and writing things down.

So I was thinking about my cycle in regards to your question and I know I've moved into my summer because I get an urge to do handstands. And this actually happens every cycle. I just want to move my body in that way and this tends to coincide with experiencing spontaneous sexual desire which just means feeling sexual desire from out of nowhere, just out of the blue. And often in settings not conducive to having sex I would say for me personally.

As opposed to responsive sexual desire which is when we experience sexual desire as a result of being in a sexy situation already. It's when you start doing something intimate, start doing something sexual and then feel desire which is actually a more common type of sexual desire for us by the way. But I also notice that I want to take massive action around this time. So when I move into my summer I'm more willing to take risks and I feel more resilient thanks to oestrogen and testosterone peaking.

And I also take the piss a lot around this time, mainly taking the piss out of my boyfriend. I'm very chatty which is quite rare for me. So they're the things that I've noticed about my cycle. Some of my clients find it hard to sit down and focus once they're in their summer. And some of this might feel familiar to you or you could have a very different experience of your cycle. So my suggestion is to keep being curious and be aware of what's going on.

And don't forget to write it all down so that you can perhaps get a better sense of things. But also ask yourself what difference is this going to make? Does it matter so much?

Okay. I also got a lot of questions about periods returning in the postpartum after giving birth. And this is something I get a lot of questions about over

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

on Instagram too. So let's go through this. Here's some of the questions that I got.

"How does your period change after birth? I'm currently six months postpartum and breastfeeding with no period and not sure what should happen and when, I sort of feel like I'm in no man's land." Another question was, "How does your period change after childbirth? What can I do to get it back?" So there wasn't much context in this question, which isn't a problem because I think it's helpful to just be talking about it more generally.

But again this is a great opportunity to ask why. Why do you want it back? Is it because you want to start trying for another baby? Do you miss having a cycle? Is it about wanting to know that everything's in good working order? And we don't really talk a lot about how long it can take for someone to start ovulating again after giving birth and there's a lot of variation. If you're not breastfeeding or chestfeeding then you can start ovulating as early as three weeks post birth, which I don't know about you but I was quite shocked by that figure.

Me, personally, I got my first period when my son was around 20 months old I think. And at the time I was still breastfeeding him during the day but I had not night weaned him before that, kind of a few months prior to that. So I reckon the night feeds in my instance were suppressing ovulation.

But a good friend of mine who basically had the exact same breastfeeding journey as me, she was also exclusively breastfeeding, feeding in the night, doing all the same things that I was doing. Our children are a similar age. And her period came back when her kid was only three months old, which was mortifying for her. So there is a huge variation here and that's okay.

Though I do recognise that when it comes to family planning and particularly around the desire to conceive again that you may be feeling a sense of urgency and I would love to coach you on that basically but this is what we're working with today. So I hope that's been helpful.



## 12. Listener Q&A 1

And this is – the next question's in a similar vein. And this one does have more context so this person shared, "I am almost nine months postpartum with my second child. After my first child was born I didn't have a period for over two and a half years. When it came back I felt more like myself, more connected to other people and overall better.

And I understand that while I'm breastfeeding it may be helpful to conserve my energy by not menstruating. Is using the cycle of the moon my best guide for now or does the postpartum time stand outside of the monthly cycling rhythm and belong to a larger lifecycle rhythm?"

So I love it when I get asked questions and the person asking the question has through the process of asking basically answered it for themselves. And I see this happen in The Flow Collective, on the community feed where the members are struggling and asking for support and suggestions from the community. But because they are directing their brain to effectively communicate what's going on for them as they create their post, they often come up with their own solution in the process which I just love.

But those of you who are in The Flow Collective who are listening, please still post when this happens to you because as I'm sure you already know, everyone else then gets to benefit from you going through that process. And it's also important for you to be seen and heard. And other people's perspectives are useful too.

Anyway back to the question. My overriding thought here is that our bodies are wise and they know what they're doing. So your body knows when the 'right' time to start ovulating and having a cycle again is. You might need some support along the way because lots of factors can influence this, including your choices around infant feeding, patterns of feeding, like the night feeds in my instance. How nourished you are, are you eating enough? Are you eating regularly enough? Are you able to rest at all? Are you feeling supported by those around you?

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

And I know that those things might be more challenging as a new mum or a new parent these days. But there's lots of factors to consider here, including have you had any blood work done to check out what's going on with your iron levels, check out what's going on with your thyroid function? Because they can influence the return of your cycle too, and on a personal note I really get this because I had a great pregnancy, a great birth, a great postpartum. It definitely had its challenges, don't get me wrong but I loved it all.

What I found hardest was not having a cycle. I, at this point when I was pregnant I'd been working with my cycle for years. And not having it felt like I'd lost part of me. And I didn't feel anchored by the menstrual cycle anymore and I really mourned that in early pregnancy, which looking back and even at the time was just so fascinating to me. Because (a) I certainly never thought I'd miss having a menstrual cycle back when I was dealing with excruciating period pain that I used to have. That was just a bit bizarre in the first place.

And (b) before my second pregnancy I'd had a miscarriage and so I wasn't expecting to miss my cycle once I was pregnant again. I thought I would just be really relieved to be pregnant again. And on that note a lot of you sent in questions about miscarriage. And I've chosen not to answer them today because I'm going to be doing a whole episode about miscarriage. But what I am going to do is make sure that I use your questions as I write the notes for that episode and the stuff that I want to cover there. So I am going to get to those.

But my point here is that I had to do a lot of work around accepting and appreciating being in a different cycle as this person put it so perfectly, a larger lifecycle rhythm. So sometimes that's what our work is, is on just accepting where we are and appreciating where we are and not being in a hurry to get out of it. Different though if you feel like you need some support, if you're feeling depleted, undernourished, all of those things then of course get that support and potentially your cycle would return as a by-product of that.

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

Okay, final question. This person said, “How can I better accept and work with my changing moods and energy in my cycle without it becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy? If I know I have a difficult task on day 18 when I’m usually tired and prefer to stay quiet, I panic well in advance. Thank you for some ideas and thank you for all the great work you do.” You are welcome.

So here’s the deal, we want to use our cycle tracking data in ways that serve us. I want you to feel empowered, sometimes that word makes me cringe but let’s go with it. I want you to feel empowered by the knowledge that you’re gathering. I don’t want you to be shitting it because of the information you’re gathering. And I completely get why you might be feeling that way. But I want you to be able to work with your cycle and to use your hormones without being a slave to them. It’s really important that we include this in the conversation.

So your hormones get to be there, they get to have their say. But we don’t want to let them run the show, particularly in unhelpful ways such as this. So I would literally talk to your brain and your hormones this way. Acknowledge their presence but let them know that you are in charge, because you are in charge. And the other way I would think about this is that whatever this task is you’re describing it as difficult. And when you think something along the lines of this is difficult and I have to do it on day 18, think about how that thought makes you feel.

I’m going to guess that you feel overwhelmed, anxious, I think you actually mentioned panic, so really what’s going on here when we explore it is that you’re making life hard for yourself way in advance of even doing this task and even being on day 18 because of your thoughts about it. So another option is to think about it in a more neutral way which could be along the lines of, it’s possible for me to do this on day 18 without issue. Or there are ways that I can support myself in this phase of my cycle that make this task totally doable.

So how they allow for the experience but also allow you to still do the task without kind of adding lots of drama on top of it? And then of course you

## 12. Listener Q&A 1

might choose to prioritize quiet time, and resting, and eating decent meals but my sense is that right now you're just in panic mode and that's probably preventing you from taking any action that's going to be helpful.

And this is the kind of thing, by the way, that I teach you how to do step-by-step in Harness Your Hormones which is the signature programme that you get as a bonus inside The Flow Collective. So come and join us so that you can get this shit sorted because this is the kind of stuff that we love to do in there.

So thank you all for submitting your questions. I have had a lot of fun doing this one today. And I'm going to do more of these in the future. So if I didn't answer your question today, I have got them saved for future episodes. I hope you've enjoyed listening to this questions and answers and I will catch you next week.

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](http://maisiehill.com) for more.