

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4



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.

Hello lovelies. Here we are, another podcast episode. And today's one is a Q&A one which I haven't done in a while. And I was asking you all on Instagram what questions you have for me. And some of my clients in The Flow Collective have submitted questions, though I would say, the ones that my clients have submitted are such good questions. I'm going to dedicate a whole episode to some of them because there's just no way I could answer them briefly. So we've got some interesting episodes coming up.

But I have picked a few questions that I think are going to be really useful for all of you to hear. So let's start off with Emma's question. So, Emma asked, "How do you find the balance between planning your life around your cycle and being able to manage the times when that simply isn't possible?" And this is such a great question and it's one I get a lot in kind of, well, different flavours of the same question. So to account for all the variations of this that I get, I'm going to be really nit picky with this question and with my answer.

But I want to start off by reminding you that just because there's maybe an optimal time to do something in your cycle or optimal times for you to do things in your cycle, that doesn't mean that you can't do these things at other times. So I just want you to think about how you are approaching working with your cycle. Are you treating it in this kind of black and white way, black and white thinking that there's a time when you can do this and there are times when you can't? Because that's just a thought. So you can question that.

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4

But also consider, are you approaching it in – and this is kind of my sense of Emma's question, that there's a black and white thinking behind either you can plan your life around the cycle, or you can't. Because planning around your cycle is always available as an option to do to some degree. So Emma's question was specific about a driving test date that's available. And Emma wants to do it because there's apparently a huge backlog because of COVID. So you want to do it, but the test is, I don't know, it's been so long since I did my driving test, I can't remember.

But let's say it's an hour of that day, what can you put in place the rest of that day and in the days preceding it that helps to support you as you go to do this at this point in your cycle? Because you can plan your life around your cycle more than you probably realise. And I always talk about cycle tracking as being like knowing the weather in advance. So it's like you got a weather report, the weather may or may not actually be like, but it gives you a sense of what to expect.

And there are times when it's raining or for me, you all know how much I struggle with the wind. If it's windy I can't always just hide inside from the wind but there are things that I can do to support myself as I go out and about like instead of walking my son to school, I will drive the car. And this definitely relates to where I am in my cycle as well. So there are times when you can change your plans based on the weather report or your cycle report. But there are other times when you just kind of need to get on with things which is what I think Emma's talking about here.

So what can you do? So instead of your brain going to what isn't possible which you can definitely question as well, go to what is possible. What can you do? And the more you take your cycle into account the less you actually need to which might sound really weird, so I'll say it again. The more you take your cycle into account the less you need to. And what I mean by that is that you might start out considering the days where you struggle the most. And if you're in The Flow Collective, that's where your hard day protocol comes in.

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4

Then you might start to consider the days that surround that time. So let's say you have period pain on days one and two of your cycle, you might prioritise really taking care of yourself on those days, but then that might expand to the day or so before and maybe the day or so after. And especially if you have heavy flow or fatigue, maybe some menstruation related anaemia, that's when those days after are going to be really valuable for you to rest to whatever degree you're able to. But there's also the rest of the cycle, what's happening on all the other days?

And some maybe don't require your attention at all, but you can still be intentional with your physical and your mental energy and all the other things that I talk about here on the podcast, the things that you do or don't do. I don't mean this in a way where you need to be prescriptive. Cycle tracking, working with your cycle isn't about having a day-by-day perfectionist way of working with your hormones, of planning your life in extreme detail because I don't think that's a good idea.

But broadly speaking we're just talking about you knowing how to care for yourself in each phase of your cycle, knowing the things that tend to trip you up, knowing the things that tend to support you. And being able to be flexible within that and be dynamic in how you care for yourself in relation to your cycle. And the more that you do this the less that you'll actually need to consider it because (a) you usually get improvements in relation to your cycle and also with your life.

But (b) your brain gets used to doing things this way, so it requires less effort upfront. And it just becomes a way of being. And as I said, Emma gave the example of having a driving test in the autumn phase of her cycle which sounds like it wouldn't be Emma's preference, which I get. It's like me having a speaking event, it's amazing when those fall between days eight and 14 of my cycle. But that's not controllable. First of all my cycle can vary a bit. And those days might not always suit the relevant people or company schedules, so what's the solution?

Well, as I've already touched on, caring for yourself throughout each cycle is going to reduce what we could call the burden or the intensity of those

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4

individual days. And the other solution which won't come as a surprise to you if you've been listening to the podcast for a while is thought work.

And this is why I'm such a fan of using menstrual cycle awareness alongside thought work. Because although your hormones influence neurotransmitters which influence your mood and all these things have an impact on your energy, your behaviour but your thoughts are always there too. And they have a very strong influence so you can think thoughts on purpose to create feelings like confidence or feeling focused for example.

Instead of just letting your most practiced thoughts run the show, the ones maybe where your inner critic is telling you you're going to fail and you're such a clumsy person. And just accepting everything that your brain is offering you. This is why I love thought work.

Okay, next up, Amy asked, "What's the best way to calm your nervous system when you're feeling very stressed?" That's another cracker of a question. It's deceptively simple and I have so much to say about this. I was thinking, I could actually create a whole course just based on this one question so thank you, Amy. And this is going to depend on the person. It's also going to depend on what nervous system state they are in as well as the context of what's going on for them internally and what's going on externally and what's happening environmentally around them.

Because essentially what works really well for me may not work well at all for someone else because we're different. Our nervous systems are different. There's definitely things in common, but also what works for me in one situation may not work well at another time. And you might have experience of that changing with your cycle. But again it depends on which nervous system state you're in. And that will also vary within one experience. So you might start off in fight or flight and then just end up in collapse or freeze as we call it.

And so what 'works' will depend on that state that you're in. And things that calm and soothe are sometimes the appropriate way of supporting yourself back into feeling safe and connected into that part of the nervous system.

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4

But sometimes we need to bring energy back into the system. Other times it's about moving that energy or safely discharging the energy that's there. So there is no one answer even for one individual person.

But the more you get to know your nervous system the more you notice your experience of different stress responses and how you have an internal experience of them. The more you can get curious and play around with things that regulate and support your nervous system and bring you back to feeling safe and connected to yourself and also to the world around you and other people. And this is where having lots of options to play with is really great. Having multiple tools in your toolbelt and for those of you in The Flow Collective, this is what I cover in the Creating Safety webinar.

And you find that in the Cycle Toolkit section of the website. There's also an exercise that you can do, that I walk you through that helps you to get to know your nervous system and you'll find that in the first Creating Safety coaching call.

Alright, next up, final question, I think you're all going to love this one as well is one that came from Emily. So, Emily asked, "If you have terrible pain", this is about period pain, "So if you have terrible period pain and are not sure where to start on the journey to making things better, what would you recommend?" And there's so much that you can do to help with period pain. So I've tried to answer this in a way where I've considered what I would do if I was to go back in time 20 years when I had horrendous period pain.

And just to give you some options depending on what's available and accessible to you so that's going to vary depending on your geographical location, what services are available to you, what services you can afford to invest in, all things like that. So I've kind of got some various things. I've got no idea if this is the best strategy for you, but it will give you something to go on. And of course there's lots of things that I cover in my books on this as well. So as a starting point, this may sound really obvious but take action.

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4

Typically what I see is my clients or sometimes when I hear from some of you on social media and things is that you're really struggling on those days where you have the period pain. And I know for some of you the pain emerges at different points in the cycle. But for those of you where it's let's say located around the time your period starts you may be struggling on those days but then the pain goes and you're just so relieved that it's gone. And then your hormones start to pick up. And before you know it, you're feeling great, you're feeling fabulous and you're just getting on with life.

And then times goes by and bam, you're back in the period pain. So just watch out for that cycle within a cycle where the period pain's there, you're thinking, I've got to really do something about this, this is awful, I can't live like this but then it goes, and you just move on understandably. You just want to get on with your life. But just you want to make sure that you're taking action otherwise just cycle after cycle goes by and you're having a really hard time when there could be something that's helping to relieve that pain.

So similarly to that, don't minimise what you're experiencing. Period pain is very common but that doesn't mean it's normal or that you have to put up with it. And period pain not being normal by the way also doesn't mean that it's anything sinister. But definitely involve your GP or a gynaecologist, go through the relevant investigations that they recommend, get yourself checked out medically. I know, I know some of you have not had great experiences with doctors and nurses etc. or you think you already know that you won't like what they're going to have to say or offer to you.

But this is important, I don't think you should skip this stage. There are red flags that a doctor can ask about. There are investigations that can be carried out, things that can be done as a starting point. And that's really useful and important. Plus there are some great doctors out there as well. But if you're unhappy with the care that you receive or care that you've received in the past then give that feedback. Here in the UK there is an organisation called PALS and they're amazing for that. I think it stands for Patient Advice and Liaison Services.

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4

You can also give feedback when you've had a great experience too. It doesn't have to be all about the negative. You can also see if your GP can refer you to a pelvic health physiotherapist. And they are just incredible at what they do. And you can find a pelvic, and obstetric, and gynaecological physiotherapist at [squeezyapp/directory](https://squeezyapp.com/directory). We'll put a link to that in the show notes. I just cannot recommend a pelvic health physio enough. They're really great for pelvic pain, bladder and bowel issues like incontinence, pelvic floor issues.

And you can speak to your GP about being referred to see someone. You can also see someone privately. Alright, next up, castor oil packs and hot water bottles, I mean a castor oil pack, you use a hot water bottle, but you could also use hot water bottle independently of that. Of course just watch out with hot bottles that you don't burn yourself. I had blisters on many occasions because my period pain was so bad that I didn't realise the hot water bottle was burning me. So learn from my mishap and just be careful there.

But also painkillers, they have their place. I hear from people who struggle on because of this judgment about using painkillers. It's okay to use painkillers.

Arvigo message, I've spoken about this before. I love it because you can go once and be taught how to do the self-care massage by the practitioner. I mean you can also go back, it's lovely to have it done. It's a great treatment to receive but it can be a very cost-effective option because once you know how to do the massage you can do it for the rest of your life even after the period pain's gone. It's lovely, lovely treatment to do on a regular basis just for ongoing health and wellbeing.

Acupuncture and herbs, you know I was going to mention them, really great for period pain in my personal and professional experience. I've had a few clients in The Flow Collective recently go for acupuncture and they have all been amazed at the difference. You can look for community-based practices as well, also known as multibed practices. And that's where you can receive a treatment at the same time as other people. And because

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4

several people are being treated at the same time it's at a reduced cost so that it can make it more accessible.

You can also find student clinics where students who are going through their degrees, maybe they're in the final year of their training, they're there and they can treat you. And I know there's not tons of unis with acupuncture courses, but they are dotted around so you can see if one's around you.

And then we move onto dietary stuff. So having a varied nutrient dense diet that's low in foods that can cause inflammation because that can be a contributing factor to period pain. So that means limiting or cutting out trans fats, fried foods, refined foods, sodas, the kind of general things that are pretty widely known as not being great for your health. But also increasing your intake of anti-inflammatory foods like fatty fish, olive oil, leafy greens, things like that. Some people really find that cutting out dairy and sugar makes a huge difference. You can try cutting them out, see what happens.

I've had plenty of DMs over the years from people telling me that they've cut out dairy and that's made a huge difference to them. But like with a lot of these things, it's going to come down to trial and error. See what works for you.

And of course, and I know, I'm hesitant to say this one because I know you all want really specific supplement recommendations from me. And there are definitely supplements that might be appropriate and really supportive for you to take. I'm thinking of things like curcumin which is the active ingredient in turmeric or an active ingredient in turmeric, magnesium, B vitamins, omega 3 fish oils, and zinc, there's other ones as well. Doesn't mean go out and buy all of those and take all of them.

Again, seeing a nutritional therapist, getting professional advice is a really great idea, much better than just randomly picking supplements and ending up with a cupboard full of things or just rattling because you're taking so many. You can find a student clinic, they're a great option. I'm trying to think from when I was doing nutritional therapy. You can go to a student

Ep #72: Listener Q&A 4

clinic I think and for about £40 or so here in the UK and with that you can have a consultation, be given dietary, lifestyle and supplement suggestions and get a follow-up appointment. So that's an option too.

For period pain I would also think about CBD oil, I love using CBD oil pre-menstrually to help me with sleep, but it can also be used for pain relief and a whole bunch of other stuff too.

And finally, someone just reached out to tell me on Instagram that they broke up with their partner and their period pain has gone. And I've had this experience too. So you could consider getting rid, dumping your shitty partner. That often works wonders. Same goes for changing a job situation, things like that.

So there's so many things and there's things beyond this as well that can help. I am just going through the things that help me, the things I've seen help my clients, where I would start if I was experiencing period pain all over again which thankfully I haven't in many, many years thanks to pretty much all of the things that I've suggested here for you. So that's it for today. What a fun episode. Thank you for submitting your questions and I'll be doing another one of these at some point in the near future, but I'll catch you next week. Bye.

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.