

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Maisie Hill**

**Period Power** with Maisie Hill

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

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.

Okay, welcome, everyone. This is a podcast that has been on my mind for a while and been in the works for a while, but I wanted to wait to have it for a particular reason which we will get onto as the conversation unfolds.

But I have two guests with me today that I know you're all going to love hearing from because we're going to be talking about getting your cycle back which is quite a prevalent topic. And I know between me and my colleagues, I would say over the last five or so years, a bit longer than that actually, five to seven years it's become more of an issue. In clinical practice we didn't used to see it so much, it was for sure there, but it's become more substantial. At least that's what me and my colleagues have been reflecting on.

So it's really great that two of my clients from The Flow Collective have come on to share about their experiences of getting their cycle back. So, welcome to both of you. Why don't you go ahead and introduce yourselves, let people know your name and your pronouns, and anything else you feel like mentioning as you introduce yourselves.

**Chloe:** Cool, okay. Hi, my name's Chloe. I'm 26 and my pronouns are she, her. And I joined The Flow Collective around about six months ago when I was about six months into my recovery. I came off birth control in July 2020. And after about three months haven't had a period. And that's when I started to realise that something might be wrong, and I wanted to kind of look into it.

**Maisie:** Okay, so that's when you joined. What about you Merle, I'm going to do my best to pronounce your name today.

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

**Merle:** You're doing a great job, honestly. I'm known by so many different names in the UK. So, Merle is absolutely fine. I'm 24 and I joined The Flow Collective in March this year, so 2021. And my pronouns are she, her as well. And I'm really happy to get the chance to talk on your podcast, Maisie. And I was reflecting on sort of why I'm so happy and the reasons for this. And I think it's because I spent many years hiding what was going on. This has been something that started basically around the time when I had my first period.

I was just hiding my symptoms and kind pretending to the people around me that everything is just fine, that was my survival strategy. And part of my recovery was to stop doing that and to just be myself, which sounds so easy. But it's not actually that hard but it feels hard, doesn't it? So this is a really nice closure again to be like, yeah, I'm not hiding anymore. I mean what a great way to actually put it out in the open, so thank you.

**Maisie:** Yeah. Well, you're welcome because, well, as you both know I think just generally with any cycle related issues, we tend to keep them hidden. I mean this has changed for sure, but I think it is something that's important for us personally when we're going through something but also just as a collective. And I don't just mean that in terms of The Flow Collective, I mean just in society that we do share our stories about what's going on. And we need to be seen and heard.

And we need help, whether that's coming from people around us, whether it's coming from professionals. And just the importance of sharing our story, sharing our collective wisdom, learning from each other, and making all the wisdom of the cycle and reproductive health much more accessible. So thank you for the part that you are both playing in that.

So I'm wondering what it was like for both of you when you just joined or when you were considering signing up, what it was like for you to enter a space and a community that has a focus on the cycle. I mean you're both in it, so you know what it's like. It's not all about the cycle, we do a lot of life stuff as well. When you first joined the community, how was it for you because you didn't have a cycle at that time, what was that like?

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

**Chloe:** I think part of it was I'd been in other communities before where it was all around HA or whatever. And I think I felt at times when people were sharing those celebratory posts, when they're like, "Yay, I've got my period back." And a part of you for a second there's this pang of jealousy because you're like, "I wish that could be me." But then you just completely flip that, and I just started to see hope. And I started to be like, oh my gosh, that's going to be me at some point. And I think the same as Merle, when you mentioned around being proud, to kind of get to this point.

I didn't see myself getting to this point and it's kind of like a big milestone. And I think being part of the community at first, seeing people talk about their periods gave me hope. And particularly when I did the Harness Your Hormones modules, I am the kind of person that gets really fascinated by it. And I was like, "This is so cool. We can learn about it." And a part of me was like, I'm learning, I'm learning. And I'm storing all these notes in my head and on my notepad ready for when I have my period.

And that was exciting but also, I was like, "I really can't wait to apply it and be able to start to see the different seasons that I'm in." And I ended up when I got my first period back, that I'd been four/five months after being into The Flow Collective, I then went back and watched the Harness Your Hormones module again because I was like, "Hang on a minute, I might have missed some things." And then I really wanted to be able to think, how can I apply it to the next cycle? That was just so exciting to know that that content was still always there.

And I think it surprised me really that I didn't feel excluded in the community to think that I'm one of the ones that doesn't have a period. Because everybody was struggling with something to do with their cycle. And it actually made me so much more grateful. So I almost cheered every time I've had a period since. I've had, how many have I had now? I've had three now, one that had quite a longer break in between. So I feel like I'm still on that path to recovery.

But every time I get one, I am just, rather than dreading it and thinking, I'm going to feel a bit shit, I'm going to have stomach cramps. I'm just like

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

pumping, so proud of my body, of myself. And so happy that it come and so grateful.

**Maisie:** Yes, it's amazing. Congratulations, it's incredible that you got your period back. How about you, Merle?

**Merle:** I love that, Chloe, I love that you're celebrating and cheering, really I can relate to that. I think for me it was really challenging, Maisie, to join The Flow Collective. I really struggled. I think I was at a point in my life where I really found it difficult to do things for myself. And that often, I mean again this is a pattern that I had even as a child.

You know when people give you things? I don't know, nice body lotions, or quality stuff, I couldn't open it. It was just there like a trophy. And I couldn't access the thing that I know was meant to make me happy, but it was more of I want to treasure this. I don't want this to go. And at that point in my life it was a huge step to invest in myself like that. Whereas now I look at things very differently and I have so much love for how I felt at that point. I'm not angry with myself for 'taking a bit longer' perhaps to do it. But it was a big step.

And I think at the beginning I kind of isolated myself a little. I was kind of stepping back and watching other people talking and admiring them as well. But I didn't really feel – I just thought that I wasn't yet entitled to actually access the coaching and the support you provide because I haven't had a cycle. And that wasn't because anybody said, "You can't take coaching if you don't have a cycle." That was just me and the thoughts that I already had kind of telling me, okay, you're already in this community where you don't really have a place yet anyway, how dare you.

And then you've got to now sit back and watch, do learning, which I did, and which was helpful. But what really benefitted me was to actually then access all the things that everybody else was accessing. And it took me a while, but I did it and the result of that was just amazing. And everybody was just extremely great.

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

**Maisie:** Yeah. And what do you think was the switch for you? I mean maybe there's more than one thing but what was the thing that helped you to take that step?

**Merle:** Honestly, I was on a phone call with another member of The Collective. It was the theme, Getting Unstuck which was an amazing theme for me anyway. And as part of that we met up with other members and we had sort of phone calls where we're just talking freely about what's going on, which was difficult because I chose a profession where I take it from other people, what's going on in their life. So it was a complete switch over. I chose a good profession to hide again.

And I actually for the first time I said to her, "I kind of feel like it would be great to do some coaching, sometimes in my head, I've got a great imagination, what it would be like and the feedback I would get. But I don't really feel entitled to do it because I don't have a cycle yet." And she was just like, "For goodness sake, what do you think Maisie would say to that?" And that was it, that was all she said. And I was just like, "Oh, yeah, I think you're right."

And then yeah, I actually accessed the coaching as well which it was so much easier than I kind of made it out to be. But it did take me a while and it was very emotional as well because even though I had at this point already opened up to my lovely partner. He's been really supportive. And I have been to the GP as well twice to do some bloods and to tell them that I'm actually struggling. But it's still not been something that I was really open to other people about.

Yeah, I think part of me really moving on from this place was to just stop the shame and just put myself out there, which again, I said this before, it sounds so simple, doesn't it? And actually it is.

**Maisie:** Well, yeah, I mean I think this is all of our work in so many ways. And you say it like, well, it's one sentence. But we often have so much story attached to these things that has been around for so long. And much of the time it's just rattling around in our own heads. And those neural

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

pathways get deeper and deeper, and then it just kind of we at some point just accept these things as fact. And just having opportunities to have other people go, “Yeah, maybe that’s not actually true. Maybe that’s not a thing.”

Maybe it’s like, in your example, that’s something you can get coached on because you might just have that story running in your head of well, this community isn’t for me or this coaching isn’t for me, or I’m not entitled to it, or whatever the particular thing is. And so when you have someone else go, “That’s ridiculous essentially”, with all the love and compassion towards you because we all get it, we all understand it.

But just to have someone say, “Yeah, maybe that’s not true actually.” And then it is so liberating when you get to hear that, yes. Okay, so when did you both get your periods back? Let’s talk about that.

**Chloe:** So I got mine at the end of August and I was four days into a brand new job. So for me I kind of thought, just I’ve got this new job, I’m so excited. And it wasn’t that I didn’t like my job before, but my mental health definitely wasn’t great there. And that’s largely because of that I was in my peak HA and was not feeling great. And was very rigid and very easily upset. And so any kind of work stress just kind of tipped me over. So I was just into this new job and I’m four days in. And I’m like, wow, maybe I’m in this new environment where my body just feels so much more comfortable.

And obviously it’s more than that because four days isn’t going to just turn my period on. It’s the build up of all of these tiny different steps. And I really wasn’t expecting it when it came. And I had tried to start tracking before that because I had started learning Harness Your Hormones, and Period Power, how to start tracking. And I was trying to see if I could see any kind of patterns. But I don’t think I ever really took all of the data of months of kind of sporadic tracking to see, maybe that’s when I was in my luteal phase, maybe I was in my autumn but didn’t quite ovulate and all of these different things.

And yeah, so it came in August, I had the first one and was super happy. And then the next one, did the next one come immediately a month after or

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

did I have a two-month break? Can't quite remember. But I remember between two cycles there was almost a 60-day break and then I had two in a row which was amazing. And one of those ones that I had I remember posting in The Flow Collective around some thoughts that I had on day 31.

And I remember I hadn't come on yet, I was on day 31 and I had these thoughts. I was like, why isn't my body repaying me for all of these things that I've been doing for months and months? I've been working on my body for nearly a year now, but truly in HA recovery for eight months or so, really working hard and making changes. And I was angry at myself, just be like, "Why me? Why my body? Why does it take so long? Why am I broken? Maybe I should go back to the doctors again and get everything checked out again."

And then the next day my period came, and I was like, "Oh, of course, it makes sense now." It makes sense why I was having these silly thoughts. And then when I wrote that down in The Flow Collective, I was like, "It was day 31." That's quite a normal cycle length I think, correct me if I'm wrong, Maisie.

**Maisie:** No, it is, it is. But I remember this, and it was like when you experience, you get the result that you've wanted of your period coming back, or for some other people it might be conceiving or whatever it is. It's like, your situation has changed, and you've got that result. And I think on the other side of that, what we anticipate is just relief, and joy, and everything, life is just going to be amazing.

But actually unless we look at what's going on with our thoughts, and our relationship with our body and all of these other things what happens is all the thoughts that you had prior to getting your cycle back just continue but they're just now you have a cycle. And now there is this often still distrust of the body and of yourself. It's like, well it came once and now it's like, you've just pinged straight, but you have that momentary relief and celebration and then you ping back into the, well, is it going to be another six months until I get another one or what?



## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

And we kind of just go straight back into the concern, and the worry, and things. And I remember you posting about that and things and thinking, yeah. And it is a learning a process of building that relationship or building a new relationship with your body and with your cycle. But I think I was so keen for you both to come onto the podcast to talk about this because I think typically what people do is they wait for something to change in order for them to think about themselves a certain way.

And both of you, I coached you both. I think it was a week or so before you both got your period back. Yeah, for everyone listening, I'm not attributing my coaching with them getting their cycles back. That's not how it works. But it meant that we had an opportunity to really look at the core beliefs and thoughts that you both had which were – I'm sure there were similarities but kind of different things going on for each of you. But I would say both common with HA hypothalamic amenorrhea, they're common themes that come up.

And it just meant that we could really look deeply at the stuff that was going on rather than you wait, because imagine if you hadn't submitted a request and I hadn't coached you. Then you would have got your period back and you might have just kind of blown past those things. But it just meant that we could really kind of take advantage of you not having that result yet and see what was going on in your brains. So how was that for both of you?

**Chloe:** Just on that just before I answer the question. I also think as well, even if I hadn't have gotten the period back, I think what The Flow Collective taught me was catching that thought on that day. And I remember writing when I posted this that let's say I had this thought on the Thursday, I was really busy at work. I didn't really have time to deal with the thoughts that were coming up. And I was hearing myself saying them. I was like, "I'm too busy."

And then the next day I had no calls in the morning, whatever, and I had some time to process it, catch the thought and this was even before my period had come that morning. And I just had time to just notice that thought.

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

And that self-coaching is something that I didn't know how to do or didn't know I could do before The Flow Collective, which actually surprised me because I've always been quite a self-aware person that kind of thinks about my thoughts and whatever. But actually taking action on them and getting the results that I want and just noticing them, so that's a massive thing that's come out of The Flow Collective.

**Maisie:** Amazing, okay. Merle, what do you want to say about all that?

**Merle:** I think what was really important for me, and again, sometimes you can do things in your head, that you've been writing them down but there's something extremely powerful about actually saying them out loud to another person, which definitely was the case for me. But my whole hypothalamic amenorrhea story really, it goes quite far back into my teenage years. And like I mentioned before when I had my first period, I think I was 12, kind of coming towards 13.

And I know that's a completely normal age, but I was quite late compared to my peers and my friends, they already had their period. And to me it was always a really important thing. I know for some people it's not, or it's annoying actually. But to me it was like, I really want this. I've got an older sister who developed very differently to me. And I always aspired to becoming this woman as well. I really wanted that. And as time went by, I pretended I already had a period. I remember buying some tampons and putting them into my bag [inaudible].

I was creating this whole image of me already being there, I was buying these bras that make your boobs look a bit bigger. And again, I say this, and I've got so much love for myself back then. But I didn't always have that and it kind of meant that when I actually had my first period, I couldn't celebrate it because I couldn't really tell anybody about it. So it kind of went, it went missing and it wasn't regular either. So again it just confirmed this belief in me, okay, I'm wrong, I can't change that. But as long as I hide it and pretend everything is normal, I think I'm going to be okay.

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

And this was how I lived through my teenage years. And I think this is kind of the belief that drives, you end up doing things that you really didn't want to do or maybe you shouldn't have done retrospectively. But because in a way you're constantly trying so hard to make sure that everybody has this image of you as being okay, and strong, and good within yourself. And I couldn't escape that. And it came to that point when I was 16 and things were very difficult at home, where I really questioned myself on a very deep level.

I don't know if this shows through but I'm actually quite a happy person. I do love life; I do enjoy living. And people became very unhappy around me, and I just questioned myself again, why is everybody unhappy and I'm kind of so happy? Again, I'm wrong, this isn't right, I shouldn't be happy anymore. And I kind of made myself unhappy and I became very controlling.

And that's when I stopped, not just eating, I also stopped doing things that generally make me feel good and this is kind of, you know, my period disappeared, and I really noticed that. Again, it just contributed to me feeling even worse about myself.

And I actually remember going to the gynaecologist at this point, I was 17 I think. And I went to her, and I said, "I don't have a period, what can I do?" And she said to me, "Okay, well, this is quite common for people with such low BMIs and things. But what I would suggest you to do is to take the pill so that we can preserve your fertility." Now, I'm sure this woman didn't mean anything bad, she just said what she thought was the most helpful. But to me, again, the pill was, it was almost like a drug because it helped me pretend again, all of a sudden, I had a period.

I had a withdrawal bleed because I was on the one where you still get a withdrawal bleed. And I went on for years, and years, and years just kind of being in this okay, I'm not right, I'm not okay but on the outside it looks as if I am. And I left Germany, that's my home country, when I was 18. And that was a really, really good step. I needed to just move away, and I came to

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

England originally for a year but I kind of planted my roots here and I'm still here now six years later which is really cool.

And bit by bit, year by year I just kind of feel like, okay, I'm a bit closer to, okay, I think this is me but I'm not 100% here. There's something really disconnecting me. And with doing this work, I just came closer and closer to understanding that my cycle is really related to this. And I had all these terrible side-effects, I don't know, Chloe, if you had them too. But I got terrible migraines on the pill. I was having mood swings. I was quite unhappy again. And again, I'm naturally a happy person I would say, and it was weird. It was really weird.

And the only time when I felt good was when I was on the pill break. So I ditched it and then there I was, I was just like, okay, oh gosh, what do I do now? And I, luckily, Maisie, I found your work because there's so much. And again, Chloe, I'm sure you can relate to this, but there's so much information out there. I'm not really on social media but even I started binge watching YouTube videos of women who got their period back and they all looked great and amazing.

And you're just sitting there thinking, oh, my gosh, I don't know, I'm growing all this hair now and they are so perfect and I'm not. So it wasn't as such helpful, but luckily, I found the book, *Period Power*. And I started using the techniques that were suggested in that book which are simple and realistic which really worked for me, it gave me a good framework. And I was able to identify all these beliefs. Sorry, I think I talked a bit much there.

**Maisie:** No, it's all, I think what you're sharing is just so common. I just know there's going to be lots of people listening to this nodding their heading, going, "It's not just me."

**Chloe:** That's the massive thing as well. I think when I started reading books like *Period Power*, started to find podcasts, starting to find resources, Merle, and I we're both similar ages. And I was almost angry. I was like, "How have I got to 26, 25 and whatever." And I was like, "How have I not learnt this before? Why was this not taught in school?" And some of the

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

misinformation that I'd had from working with GPs had led me to go down a more kind of niche route.

And I worked with a functional nutritional therapist, Holly Dunn who was just absolutely fantastic at the start of my recovery. And those were the kind of things that I just needed to lean on because I just hadn't had any of that. None of us have had any of that education. And even now when I'm starting to tell, you know, I'm very open with my friends around having gone through HA. And it's still a touchy subject talking about the pill. And I always want people to know, your decision, not mine. I don't want to force anything. But I just want to share more around my experience.

And actually, Merle, what you mentioned around having side-effects on the pill, I didn't have any specific side-effects other than horrific mood swings, ups and downs, ups and downs. But because everything else was so plain sailing, I was like, "It's so much easier to stay on this, so much easier to stay on it for a contraceptive and to know when my period's going to be, to control it if I don't want to have a period, if I'm going on holiday." I was like, "I can put up with the mood swings."

But then every now and then the mood swings would get so bad, it would affect my mental health and I would be like, "Right, I'm going to try a different pill." And I just kept trying and trying, to the point where I stayed with one for a while and I was like, "This doesn't seem right." And so for me personally the side-effect of the pill was how it affected my mental health. And when I first came off the pill, I think I was quite – I had no idea what HA was.

And when I first came off the pill, I think I was quite naïve in thinking, I'm just going to become this new person. I'm going to become me. I'm going to become so natural. And when I first came off, I felt amazing. I was like, "It's so great not being on the pill, this is amazing." Bearing in mind this was six to eight weeks after, I still hadn't had a period. I'm thinking, no, it will come soon, it will come. And then three months goes by, six months goes by. And then I'm starting to think, something's still not quite right here.

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

And something I really want to mention as well. At the start of my HA recovery when I was working with Holly at the start, I was starting to make changes to my diet, my lifestyle, just everyday tiny habits, it was rough, really rough. And I've got photos of myself, I thought that there must be some sort of psychological thing around this, because I've seen people do it. I've got photos myself crying at various different types of the year. And it's not just tearful, it's really, really like, it would have happened after a panic attack, just really, really, really upset.

And it will be happening once a week minimum, and I remember thinking, oh my God, this is so, so rough, this whole journey. And on top of that I'm gaining weight which feels so uncomfortable. I was gaining weight because I knew I needed to. I was never hugely underweight, but I was clearly not eating enough for my body/I was just letting go of that control I had around so many tiny habits. I think that's kind of how I got to where I was because I am a really disciplined person. I am that typical type A person and I'm really proud of that for certain reasons.

It's really helped me in my career for example. But then there can be downsides to that where you become too good at being too disciplined. You're too good at telling yourself you don't need that snack. And yes, you should go and get your 10,000 steps in. And my whole HA recovery has felt at first, I couldn't identify because I was like, "Well, I don't think I'm someone that has an eating disorder but maybe I have disordered eating." But then I'm like I still don't feel like I'm that extreme. I was somewhere in the middle.

And that's when I realised, it was all the tiny little habits that I had picked up and starting pulling into my life that people talk about all the time. You're making these tiny habits to be healthier. And they are really, it's really great advice. But if you take it too far then it kind of leads you into having HA because I was just controlling so many aspects of my life.

I think the best way to describe this is pre COVID how I used to be, when I was going to work I would get up at half past five in the morning, chuck a black coffee down me, no food, go straight to the gym to do an intense

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

workout, rush to have a really, really quick shower. Run to the train because I was running late, do my make-up on the train. Commute into London. Get off a stop early or quite a few stops early because I wanted to get my steps in. So it's all of those tiny things. And then by the time I get into the office it's two or three hours after I've worked out, I've had no food.

My hormones are just screaming, my cortisol levels are crazy high. I had tests that showed that. I'm kind of going off on a tangent here but it's just all of those little things.

**Maisie:** I love that you're sharing this detail because honestly, the number of clients I've had over the years who tell me the exact same thing. That's what so many people's mornings look like, or a variation of it. Someone, they might have kids or other people in the household that they're caring for. And so they just put themselves last and they don't eat breakfast until everyone else is taken care of. And so it is very common.

And I think certainly my experience as a practitioner and now as a coach is that we need to be on the lookout for these things as in, yes, these things sound great on paper. But where is someone's desire or urge to do them coming from? What is the fundamental thought or belief they have that's leading them to do this? And often it's some variation of I'm not good enough, I need to be better, I'm not acceptable. If I do this then I'll get to think differently, and other people will think differently about me.

**Chloe:** Yeah. It all comes back to that perfectionism, I've got to do it all perfectly to tick off all of these amazing things. And I'll be the best person that I can be. It will come back to that.

**Maisie:** Yeah. It's just lethal, I mean for everything but particularly when we're talking about hypothalamic amenorrhea. I knew there would be one time I would struggle to say it. And this is why when we're looking at supporting people to getting their cycle back, I love that you brought up that, Chloe, that often those early days can feel so challenging to let go of these so called little habits that you've built up. Because often people are reliant on them for some way as a coping method or strategy.

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

And we can debate, well, is it actually a kind, a helpful, a 'healthy' one to have? But often when you start talking to people about their exercise routine, their eating habits, other lifestyle factors, the idea of changing those or letting go of some of them feels fucking scary when you're so used to using them as a method of getting through your day.

So there needs to be that component of let's make sure you're able to process and have your emotions and take care of your emotional and mental wellbeing. So that you're not actually needing those things so much in the first place. I'd love to hear both of your thoughts on that.

**Merle:** Well, I would like to share on this one. And I'm hoping that this maybe gives some folks out there some hope as well. You get hard days and it's certainly not an easy thing. But it's also incredibly beautiful. I had so much joy, or so many joyful days when I was just letting go. I mean I wouldn't say I was somebody, even though I had terrible eating patterns and behaviour patterns, I wasn't as influenced by perhaps what some social trends would suggest you doing slightly healthy.

This didn't really influence me so much, I think for me it was more the belief of I don't deserve this or I'm not good enough for this yet. But when I actually did let go, I had some fun, honestly, it was really cool. And personally my body image really improved the more I ate, and food became less of a problem. I think you start to think about, what should I eat now? What should I eat to get my hormones on track? And then I ended up having a week of eating a lot of sandwiches and cakes, and then just anything that I really needed and wanted.

And after that it kind of normalised. I've got a good appetite, I'm hungry for life, I am. And it doesn't look bad on me at all. And I remember as months go by and I looked in the mirror and I was just like, "Oh yeah, this is nice that I can actually go out again and have confidence." I can go in the room and I'm like, you know, they used to call me Tinkerbell at work because I [inaudible], I mean it's so much work, incredibly challenging.



## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

It's hot outside and everybody's kind of almost wearing nothing and I hated that because I would really hide in my clothing. Again, I would pretend that my body is normal. But actually I was too skinny. And I don't have to do that anymore. And I love that. And I got my period back after, I think, about a year. And I think six months in it's really shifted. I wasn't thinking about my food anymore, I was just having fun, really getting all the fun that I missed on into my life now.

And I was just really enjoying myself and I got my period back. And quite soon after I got pregnant, which is really cool as well, a bit unexpected.

**Maisie:** Congratulations.

**Merle:** Thank you.

**Maisie:** This is why I wanted to wait because I wanted to wait long enough because I thought it was really important that we get to celebrate that. And also people can hear how quickly this happened for you. So give us the timeline.

**Merle:** Yes, it happened very quickly. I think it must have been about two or three months after my first recovery period. And I'm just saying, it wasn't planned. I'm not unhappy at all. I really wanted to become a mother, but I didn't think it would happen, I thought it would be very difficult for us to actually conceive. And I was in denial. And I remember, I was having terrible pregnancy sickness and I couldn't put it together.

I just refused to think that I'm pregnant until I think it was people just kept on saying, "Well, when do you think you might want to do a test?" All these symptoms and I remember, I was really snapping at my partner for like, "You're such a man, you think women just get pregnant all the time." I was just having all the [inaudible], bless him. And I was already pregnant, yeah. But again, if you're not prepared to have a child and you are kind of in HA recovery or just had your first period back.

And if this isn't an option for you, be careful, use a condom, I don't know, just something, if you don't want it to happen because actually if your body

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

is at that stage, it will do it. And my pregnancy is going incredibly well. I'm five months now.

**Maisie:** Yeah, how far along? Amazing. And it's just such a journey to you because I remember, and I don't know what you want to share. So I'll just keep it vague for you. But I just remember the stuff that we coached on before you got your period back, it's just amazing. I mean did you ever think in that moment that you would be where you are now in such a short space of time?

**Merle:** No, I didn't. And, again, I'm trying to have a lot of faith and trust in myself. And I do sometimes – okay, I'm going to try and not because this might sound a bit weird. But in a way I do imagine myself in what I'm going to be doing in the future, and I take comfort in that and almost communicate with myself at that point and just get some faith from that and some hope that I can do this. I can be okay again. And I've done this from a very young age.

And I sometimes often go back to points in my lifeline where I just remember me really struggling. And I try and travel back to that child and just give her some comfort as well. I know this sounds probably really weird, I don't know if this makes sense for people.

**Maisie:** It makes complete sense. It's also very clear to me as your coach and knowing you a bit from the community and things that that's really evident. Even today just as we've been talking this through, the tenderness that you've shown towards yourself and to yourself in the past as well.

Because something that I've seen in clients over the years is that they realise, there are these things that maybe if I'd have done life a bit differently then I wouldn't now be in the situation that I'm in, whatever that is. Whether we're talking about the cycle or just life stuff in general. So then what they do is just beat themselves up about it and judge themselves, and criticise themselves, and not particularly helpful. But it's really lovely to hear that way that you've described your relationship with your past self.

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

And now with your future self you are just having that compassion, and tenderness, and love for yourself, it's really beautiful to hear.

**Merle:** Thank you. And it feels beautiful too. It's a nice way of being.

**Maisie:** Yeah. And such a wonderful way of being particularly when you're about to approach parenting or you already are in your pregnancy, yeah.

**Merle:** Yeah. Actually the baby's just kicked.

**Chloe:** Aww, I love that. I can relate more to that whole looking back. And looking back in self-love. I'm still very much on that journey. But for me a massive theme that came out or a realisation I guess, through HA recovery would be around body dysmorphia. And looking back at old photos and thinking why was I so unhappy at that point with my body? And it just shows that that quote that people say, it was never about your body, it really never was.

Because I look back at those photos and I'm almost annoyed because I was like, "Why couldn't I have appreciated the body when I had that?" Even though it was not healthy at the time. But at that time I still just beat myself up about it. And that's the bit that I'm now really trying to apply now where I'm in a bigger body and I'm kind of getting used to it still, to now apply that and love my body and appreciate it. And I think that will always be an ongoing journey like it is for most people. But I'm so glad I've gone through that to get to this point in my realisation.

**Maisie:** Yes. Because this is such a huge part of why people get hypothalamic amenorrhea in the first place. And why the journey to recovery can have some obstacles in the way. And they are for sure ones that can be addressed, and supported, and worked through as you are a beautiful testament of, Chloe. But we're talking about messages we've received about our bodies for decades and decades. And this is why often as you said, it's not about the weight.

Because people get to their weight whether that's they're losing weight, whether it's gaining weight, but they get to the place that they have thought

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

was this mythical place of when I get there then life is going to be great. And they get there they're like, "No, I've still got all of my shitty thoughts here." They haven't gone anywhere. Yeah.

**Chloe:** It's like bringing the baggage with you, you get there and you're like, I still feel like shit.

**Maisie:** Yes. So what happens whenever I have a client on that's had these results, I always get messages asking for more detail about how you have created these results for yourself. So let's make sure we cover that. What do you think has been most helpful to you as you've been going through this process? Let's have some of the things from both of you.

**Merle:** So many things.

**Maisie:** Well, that's the thing because as you said already, it's not always one particular thing, it's like sometimes. But I think people often think there is going to be a magic bullet and that's why probably you've maybe found yourself watching so many YouTube videos. It's like if I just find the one thing that someone mentions.

**Merle:** It was ridiculous. I know, you're looking for the magic formula. No, okay, I think if I make a start now. What I really recommend and what was incredibly important to me was that I stopped hiding, that I stop pretending that everything is okay and that I'm open about what's going on. And the feedback I had, I'm probably very fortunate there, but people in my life have been very understanding and very helpful and passionate with me. So I was very lucky there and I'm very grateful for that.

And when it comes to food, it's very likely to get again controlling and obsessive with that in your HA recovery. And what I would say is we can, you know, Maisie, you said to me, every day we can choose who we want to be. Nobody needs to know. The power that we have, we can create our own realities, but it doesn't mean that we have to control everything along the way. That's a huge difference. And I would say, if possible, when things really shifted for me is when I stopped thinking about what I was eating, how I was just having a good time.

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

And when it comes to things like exercise, I started gardening and that was incredible for me because especially with the belief of I can't be nurturing, I can't grow anything to actually see you counting the seeds and having it grow, it was fantastic. It was a way of using my body in a really very meaningful way because gardening is hard work. I struggled the next day. But I felt like it was a meaningful way of exercising my body. And I do lots of other things that I really enjoy, not to exercise, but because they give me fun.

I get dizzy very quickly, so if somebody spins me, that's horrible. But I love stuff that balances me, and I think it's probably related to me getting dizzy quickly. So I loved anything that gave me a sense of physical balance which I shared with The Flow Collective as well. I'm a very passionate unicyclist, although I can't unicycle at the moment because I'm pregnant, that wouldn't be safe. But my partner and I, we would go unicycling together. I've done some scuba diving which is also very much related to being buoyant and balanced.

So I enjoy to myself in that way and food just became less important, it really did. I still enjoyed it, but it was more about using my [inaudible] rather than having the right food to eat, if that makes sense.

**Maisie:** Yes. No, and I love that, it is definitely – I've had clients over the years be like, "Well, if I eat this and this, and these are the things that I know are good for me to be eating." And then I'm just like, "Yeah, have you thought about having any cake?" And they're just like, "What?" Completely not expecting it at all. And it's always really hilarious for me to see the look on someone's face.

**Merle:** It is funny, and I think what I probably – the only thing I really did focus on was making sure that I get enough animal proteins in as well, which I really love. So it wasn't even hard, it just really made me feel good. And the only other thing [inaudible] extremely important was, I've done some sort of work around connecting with my womb and connecting also with my mother and the other females in my family and kind of their stories. And we did this one meditation, I don't know if you remember, Maisie. It

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

was at the start of the Getting Unstuck theme with them, like a collective meditation.

**Maisie:** Yes. I'd forgotten about that.

**Merle:** I don't know how many times I've watched it; I think if you go onto that first video and on minute 5 and 17 seconds, that's when it starts. And I've done that meditation many, many times because it felt good, I felt part of it. It wasn't just watching it somewhere on YouTube, it felt more close to home I think and very connecting. I loved doing that, absolutely loved it. So this is something that I would really encourage people to do is sit down and place your hands on your womb and connect to it, feel into it and it's incredible.

**Maisie:** That's amazing. Alright, what about you, Chloe, what's helped you?

**Chloe:** So a part of me just wants to reel off a ton of things that I did. And I'm like, if I literally had a minute and I had a gun to my head and I had to say one thing, it's very similar to what Merle said at the beginning is the people and the communities that you surround yourself with. When I look back on this year and from the very beginning of my recovery, the amount of different people I've either worked with or surrounded myself with has been, I think, just keeps you – I don't know – grounded in what you're doing and why you're doing it.

So whether that be investing in The Flow Collective, whether that be me investing in to begin with a functional nutritional therapist to help me. I took advantage of some free therapy sessions we had through work. When I had my first period, I was then ready to start slowly start training again or even just start stretching, start moving more and just do really, really light workouts. So I started working with a woman called Chloe Hodgkinson and she was a PT specialising in HA. She's been through it herself.

And it's just all of those different communities and different people, particularly in The Flow Collective, I don't think I really realised how much being in a group of people that cheerleads you on in the group chat when

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

you're being coached and vice versa. I love doing that. And even just commenting on people's posts and just hearing and talking about it just makes a massive difference. Because you not only feel kind of that other people understand because they're either talking about hormones or have been through it themselves.

But you also just feel part of this family of people that are doing it with you and are going to celebrate when you do get that celebratory period. And they did. I got tons of people commenting saying, "Congratulations, you did this." And it's just so nice to be part of that.

**Maisie:** Yeah, it is, the level of connection that we have is so special and there have been so many moments where I see members celebrating, including both of you. And I'm literally just on my own over here dancing around the room, so thrilled for all of you. No matter it is that we're all celebrating but I do think that's been something that I really wanted to be part of The Flow Collective, is that we have this strong culture of celebrating and celebrating everything, not just waiting for the big thing but all of the little achievements along the way.

And I think that's, for me as a coach, not as the person going through it, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on this, is that when you are trying to get your cycle back that you are celebrating the other things that come first. What are your thoughts on that?

**Chloe:** Yeah, massively, I think celebrating the tiny wins even on a weekly basis, it's just so worth doing. Whether you share it with people or not you should definitely at least journal about it. And just for me there were tiny wins such as one of the biggest things I had with HA was brain fog where I would be in meetings. And then the next week I would completely forget what we spoke about that in the meeting. And the notes that I had written, I don't remember writing. And just small things like that.

And when that started to lift, I was like, "I didn't have brain fog this week. I completely remembered what we talked about last week. I feel so on top of my game of what I'm doing here at work." Or I had other wins like cooking a

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

recipe that I had no idea what the calories were in or just what I would have previously cooked and just gone for it. And just all of those tiny things, that's what makes recovery work.

**Maisie:** They're big things.

**Chloe:** Well, they are big things, yeah, they are, yeah.

**Maisie:** Yeah, I love that. What about you, Merle?

**Merle:** Absolutely, it's important to celebrate those. And I think in a way, again, I was very fortunate that I feel the people in my life at the moment that are really close to me automatically celebrate them with me. Because my brain changed. You talked about neuroplasticity before, Maisie, and when we're at the start of something, that the brain, at the end of it or even during the process, it's going to look different already. And it's going to have a very different capacity to take things in or to maybe even filter things out that we don't really want to use to define us anymore.

And it becomes so much clearer the more you engage in just living and eating what you need and not going on a run because you have to. So the more we do stuff like this the more we realise, I think, or our brains have the capacity to realise that it's not what we eat that defines us, or the things that we exclude that defines us. We can use other things that can mean so much greater stuff about us. And it all happens, or I'm sure it will happen if we just allow ourselves to, cliché, let go. And be alive and enjoy life and just puff. I'm sorry, now I'm running out of words, but I hope the message comes through.

**Maisie:** It really does. I think that's such a good point. I've felt there's been various moments with both of you have been sharing today where I've just had goosebumps. I'm like, "Oh yes, this is all so important." I'm so glad you both came on. And is there anything else that either of you want to mention?

**Chloe:** I think one thing I would say is because I had listened to so many podcasts that use celebratory stories. And I think one thing I would say is



## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

just know that your time will come, and patience is the best thing. The body is complex. It will take a time, and just keep on going, and keep on trying small things each day, being a little bit more flexible, letting go, like Merle says. And just keep being patient because your time will come.

**Merle:** Yeah. And your body's not against you. You're not broken.

**Maisie:** Yeah, this is it, isn't it? Is that I think it was actually in the Harness Your Hormones module where I'm talking through self-coaching. But just that when you are in your recovery from HA the tendency or the expectation is to wait for your period to be back to consider that you are recovering also. And it's just, for me, helping people to see that they are recovering, just like Chloe, you were talking about, noticing the other shifts, the other things that were going on and seeing the steps along the way that ultimately get you to the top.

And I remember, I'm pretty sure I remember you posting about this or commenting at some point about you managing your mind as you saw other people celebrating getting their periods back. And I remember when you posted and celebrating yours that you were so considerate and loving towards the other members and letting them know that their time would also come. And that you had been in their position as well. And that's just such a powerful thing to offer to everyone.

**Chloe:** Thank you. Thanks for having us, Maisie.

**Maisie:** Well, thank you so much to both of you for coming on. I'm just so delighted for both of you for all of the results that you have created, getting your cycle back, having improved health and the impact of that in your professional and personal lives. Merle, congratulations, you made a baby.

**Merle:** Gosh, I know.

**Maisie:** It's amazing, so amazing. I really appreciate you both coming on so generously to share about your story. We're all going to start crying now. Okay, let's wrap up and we can have a cry. Okay, everyone, I hope you found this conversation valuable. I'm sure you have, whether or not you

## Ep #58: Getting Your Cycle Back

have experience of not having a cycle and trying to get it back or not I just think this is so important that we have these conversations. Because the potential for someone to dip into this and to lose their cycle is there.

And when we're aware of how things can impact our cycle then we can hopefully prevent more of that from happening. So, thank you both for coming on.

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.