

Exercise and the menstrual cycle

Women are really lucky to get a monthly (21-35days) report card on their health. Our menstrual cycle can tell us a lot about what is going on internally over a 'period' of time. This is because it takes a whole 100 days for the follicle to mature for ovulation and there are many factors that can interrupt the maturation of an ovarian follicle.

What will be discussed:

Training on your cycle

Normal symptoms

Diet advice

Training on your cycle

Menstruation (bleeding)- This is the time to slow down. You will have less energy and therefore possibly less motivation. Listen to your body. Set realistic goals for this time of your cycle e.g. walking, stretching, yoga, Pilates, are great options for exercise. Still include movement as this help to reduce discomfort during menstruation.

Pre-ovulation- This is when your energy picks up and you are becoming more motivated but be mindful that we can sometime over commit (in all areas of life) from the increased energy. Increase you exercise, as you can handle a bit more but still stay within a level that is achievable for you, so you don't burn out.

Ovulation- This is when we have the most energy and confidence. Use these feelings to your advantage. During this time, you can handle high intensity style trainings and push your boundaries in your training. Unfortunately, this does not last very long, up to 4 days before things start to slow down again.

Pre-menstrual- The relaxing stage of the cycle. Again, really listen to your body. It may not be up to doing as many HIIT classes as before, so change things up or slow things down to match your body's needs.

Normal symptoms of a cycle

Length- A healthy cycle (day 1 of bleed to day 1 of bleed) should be between 21-35 days for an adult (teenagers are different). This duration accounts for the difference in lengths of certain phase, which are different for everyone.

Blood lost- Your bleed should last between 2-7 days. A heavy period can cause an excess amount of blood lost, this is normally due to high levels of oestrogen or low levels of progesterone. A total of 50ml is an appropriate amount of blood to lose over all days of bleeding.

Example of blood lost

- 1x Regular tampons= 5ml
- 1x Super tampon=10ml

Pain- Period should not be causing you agonising pain. A little bit of cramping in the lower pelvis or back on the first few days is normal but pain should not interfere with daily activities. Pain that doesn't improve with ibuprofen or dietary changes should be investigated further.

Dietary advice- Consume Phytoestrogens - Bind to estrogen receptors so they act like estrogen. Before menopause phytoestrogens have an antiestrogenic effect on the body and can be used to balance estrogen levels. This is particularly helpful for high estrogen levels. After menopause research highlights that phytoestrogen have an estrogenic effect and can reduce the occurrence of breast cancer, support bone-healthy and reduce menopausal symptoms.

Sources: Nuts/seeds - "Soy" (Isoflavones)_ whole grains - " Flax seeds" (Ligans)