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Go with the FLOW

Learning to read your monthly menstrual flow is key to maintaining top notch health, says Sam Cowan



For most of us, getting our period means feeling tired and grouchy teamed with a raging desire to wolf down chocolate by the bucketload.

But according to dynamic health educator Alisa Vitti, we should be celebrating our monthly cycle and using it as a barometer for our overall health and wellbeing. "When you align deeply with your reproductive organs, you get into the most powerful container for your life," says Alisa, a naturopath who has helped thousands of women to regain menstrual balance and harmony. She advises that the sign of a healthy cycle is a bright red flow which lasts for at least three days, with periods spaced 28 to 32 days apart. If there are changes, it could mean that your body has been tipped out of balance due to stress levels, diet and exposure to toxins.

To fully understand your menstrual cycle you need to understand the endocrine system. This system, which Alisa describes as 'an elegantly complex miracle', regulates our hormones which control the conversation between our brain and our ovaries. It is imbalances in this system which underlie many gynaecological problems. "Most endocrine problems can be corrected through using specific foods at the right time and in sequence," says Alisa, who has a background in integrated medicine and nutrition. In fact, it was through using food and lifestyle to manipulate her own hormonal biochemistry that Alisa was able to reverse a diagnosis of polycystic ovary syndrome.

DYNAMIC HEALTH

Alisa Vitti is a dynamic health educator. She teaches women how to use natural methods to heal cystic ovaries, eliminate PMS, regulate periods, regain their hormonal balance, increase libido and get pregnant. For more information go to FLOliving.com



Body | MENSTRUATION

HOW DIET CAN HELP

"The best form of hormonal self care that we can practise," says Alisa, "is to put good quality food in 80 per cent of the time." Although everyone's requirements are different, there are some general guidelines on how to use food to help with common gynaecological problems.

■ If your flow is heavy, indicating that there is too much oestrogen in your system, cut out soy products, which contain phyto-oestrogens, and increase the amount of dark, leafy vegetables in your diet.

■ If your flow is sluggish, and your periods begin with a brown stain, eliminate white flour. Increase your intake of wholegrains and good fats from fish and avocado.

■ To help with fertility, decrease dairy products and eliminate soy products and sugar. Have two heaped tablespoons of organic, ground-up flax daily to support oestrogen elimination. Include rich, oily foods to help with follicular stimulation. Eat lots of egg yolks, salmon, smoked salmon, caviar and other fish eggs. Sea vegetables are also good. Make sure that you decrease your stress levels.

■ To decrease PMS, eliminate caffeine, sugar, salt and alcohol. Have diuretic vegetables such as radishes, celery, fennel and asparagus. Drink warm water with lemon, cinnamon bark and cayenne pepper. Foods which are rich in omega 3s, such as salmon and avocado, are also beneficial.

Chocolate is fine, as long as it is dark chocolate, with over 65 per cent cacao.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR FLOW

This is what the different variations in your monthly blood flow can mean:

- **Brown stains.** If your period begins with brown staining or spotting, rather than a red flow, this is a sign of stagnant blood and indicates low levels of the hormone progesterone. This hormone is key in preventing miscarriages, so it is important to track it to prevent future infertility.
- **Black or dark red blood clots.** These can range in size from a one pence piece to the size of a golf ball and are also a sign of low progesterone. Women with low progesterone levels may also find that their periods are more than 30 days apart.

- **Heavy bleeding.** This can be a sign of fibroids or polyps. Heavy bleeding occurs when there is a build-up of the hormone oestrogen in the body, so the question to ask is whether the body is able to eliminate oestrogen properly. Are you eating enough fibre? Are you having adequate bowel movements?
- **Short bleeds.** Periods that only last 1-2 days can indicate a deficiency in either iron or progesterone.
- **Very frequent bleeds.** If the gap between periods is much shorter than 28 days, it is recommended to investigate thyroid health and to check whether the frequent bleeding is causing anaemia.

■ **Remember:** if you use a mooncup or tampons, you are unlikely to know about the quality of your bleed. Try switching to sanitary towels occasionally to observe your flow.

VAGINAL BREATHING

According to women's wellbeing expert Gabriella Guglieminotti Threl, breathing from our vagina brings chi and awareness to an area which regulates our vital energy and can inform us if our sexual behaviour is not serving us emotionally or spiritually.

- 1 Bring your awareness to your genital and pelvic area (the base chakra).
- 2 Imagine that your genitals can breathe.
- 3 As you breathe in, imagine a flow of energy coming up from the earth, through your genitals and into your body.
- 4 Draw the breath up your body and release it through your nostrils when you exhale.



ALISA'S GUIDE TO IMPROVING YOUR HORMONAL HEALTH

- 1 Eliminate caffeine, to keep blood glucose stable.
- 2 Eliminate white flour and refined sugar, to keep blood sugar levels stable.
- 3 The hormones in milk are designed to make baby cows, sheep and goats grow, so decrease dairy from the diet, along with other hormone-rich foods such as non-organic meat.
- 4 Aim for a diet that is 80 per cent organic.
- 5 Eat one cup of cooked, dark, leafy vegetables per day to keep oestrogen and progesterone levels balanced. Vegetables which are rich in calcium and magnesium, such as kale, chard and spinach, are excellent for the menstrual flow.
- 6 Eat regularly. Skipping meals does not make for a happy endocrine system.
- 7 Be wary of hormones in pollutants such as pesticides in conventionally grown foods, ingredients in cosmetics and the xeno-oestrogens that are introduced in the dry-cleaning process. Alisa explains that when the body has to work hard to rid itself of these environmental toxins, there is more chance that excess oestrogen will be left behind in the system.
- 8 Use natural deodorant. Antiperspirants seal in the waste flow, making it harder for your body to eliminate unwanted toxins.
- 9 Cut down on stress. Burning the candle at both ends, along with taking stimulants to keep going, will play havoc with your hormones.
- 10 Up your pleasure and exercise quota. Massage, yoga, stretching and orgasms (whether through sex or self pleasure) will give your hormonal system a boost.

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THE SEASONS OF YOUR CYCLE

Gabriella Guglieminotti Trivel, who educates women on the psycho-spiritual aspects of their monthly cycle, explains that in every menstrual cycle we pass through four seasons. Each season has its own distinct energy and is best-suited for a particular purpose.

After finishing our period, the first season we pass through is spring. As this marks the start of a new cycle, there is freshness, newness and a sense of optimism. It is a time for being enthusiastic and trusting, for working on goals and for making things happen. Spring is time to take on new projects, be sociable and career-oriented.

Summer occurs around the time of ovulation, when our body is at its most fertile. Energy levels are high and it is easy to multi-task. This is the time when we are at our most outgoing and confident and can connect and attract effortlessly.

As the womb lining breaks down, we enter the pre-menstrual season of autumn. Our energy turns inwards and we become more introverted and insular. As our focus becomes more self-directed, the voice of the self critic (if we have one) will become louder. The body will be wanting more sleep.

Once our bleeding begins, we have entered winter. This is a time for solitude and insights, for being contemplative rather than career focused. Women are likely to be more philosophical and psychic at this time and dreams will be revealing.

"Burning the candle at both ends plays havoc with hormones"



HORMONE-BALANCING JUICE

This hormone-balancing juice, which Alisa recommends to her clients, supports the endocrine system at all times of the month. It eliminates excess oestrogen, detoxifies the liver and eliminates fluid retention.

- 2 medium beets (not the greens)
- 1/2 bunch cilantro (coriander leaves)
- 1 small lemon with peel
- 1/2 green apple
- 2 stalks celery
- 1 inch cube of ginger

Juice all ingredients together and serve.

Gabriella believes that it is because women do not acknowledge the seasons of their cycle that they can experience periods as "something painful that gets in the way." Her advice to women who have cut off from their periods is to start breathing through their vaginas. "If you are one of those women who says: 'I don't like my period', it will change your life!"

Gabriella maintains that tuning in to the menstrual seasons will benefit not only us, but also our relationships. "For a man, it is a privilege to be with an empowered woman who is happy in her body."

MORE INFO

To find out more about Gabriella's workshops and individual work, please visit: flyinginspiration.co.uk

