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Workout Guide

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This might be a relief for you - or a surprise - but you don't have to do the same workout every day. In fact, if you have a menstruating body, it's counterintuitive and counterproductive to your fitness goals to do so!

By now you're familiar with cycle-syncing, so you understand that our bodies go through 4 different phases of hormonal cycles each month. However, most prescribed workouts don't take this into consideration.

It's worth sharing a quote from a New York Times article called "[What Exercise Science Doesn't Know About Women](#)":

"Scientists know, of course, that women are not men. But they often rely on male subjects exclusively, particularly in the exercise-science realm, where, numerically, fewer female athletes exist to be studied. But when sports scientists recreate classic men-only experiments with distaff subjects, the women often react quite differently...In the meantime, female athletes should view with skepticism the results from exercise studies that use only male subjects. As Dr. Rowlands says — echoing a chorus of men before him — when it comes to women, there's a great deal that sports scientists 'just don't understand.'"

So if these studies can't help you crack the code on when to hit the gym, how can you create a sustainable exercise schedule that delivers results and fits into your busy life? By relying on the intuitive wisdom of your hormones, of course!

Your metabolism fluctuates throughout the 4 phases of your cycle

Just like food, exercise is an essential tool for achieving and maintaining optimal endocrine health. But understanding how to implement this powerful tool is key — despite what popular culture and social media stars would have you believe, more is not better when it comes to getting fit, and strategically syncing up your cycle with your workouts is the only way to ensure real results and happy, healthy hormones.

In fact:

- Your resting blood sugar level fluctuates during the cycle and demands different workout lengths at different times
- You sweat more during phases when you need to flush excess estrogen
- When hormones are at their lowest levels, it's best to do active rest and recovery

During the luteal phase, your BMR (basal metabolic rate) rises by 10-20%, which means you'll burn more calories at rest. Ever wonder why you're ravenous and craving all sorts of carbs/sugar during this pre-menstrual phase? It's because of this increase in metabolism and the natural need for more calories.

But even though you're burning more calories, it's actually counterintuitive to overdo your workout during the increase in calorie burn. Increased exercise during the luteal phase can actually turn on fat storage and increase muscle wasting because of your body's increased appetite, calorie need, and the introduction of progesterone.

Read on for more specific recommendations of how tailor your workouts to your hormonal changes!

How Long Should Your Workout Really Be?

It takes about 30 minutes of exercise to burn through all the glucose in your bloodstream. Once that's gone, you start forcing your adrenal glands to pump out cortisol to get your fat cells to convert into sugar for the blood stream. While this may seem like a surefire way to melt unwanted pounds, that's not the case for women with too much estrogen (the most common root cause of period problems, fertility issues, and other forms of hormonal chaos). When your body is overloaded with estrogen, the circulating sugar gets converted to fat, perpetuating a vicious cycle (and this is assuming your adrenals are working perfectly — not the case for many super stressed women).

Exercising for more than 30 minutes at a time puts undue stress on your adrenal glands by causing cortisol to skyrocket and any excess estrogen to encourage further fat production. Rather than wasting hours on the elliptical, focus your efforts with a 30-minute session that fits the categories below.



My Go-To Exercise Schedule For Women

So without further ado, here's your phase-by-phase, no-brainer guide to cycle-syncing your workouts and finding the best time of day to reap the biggest rewards:

Phase 1: Follicular

Workout suggestions:

Running
Biking
Dance
Rebounding

Because your brain chemistry is wired for new things, it's a great time to try something new or bust out of your comfort zone.

Ideal times:

Mid-day – your estrogen will be low and your cortisol levels will be just right for a challenging cardio burst.

Phase 2: Ovulation

Workout suggestions:

Interval running
HIIT
Soul Cycle
Bootcamp

You have energy to burn during this phase, so go for it!

Ideal times:

Early morning – you'll have tons of energy during this time of the month, so take advantage of that natural high! Your testosterone is higher during this phase, so whatever you do, feel free to go all out!

Phase 3: Luteal

Workout suggestions:

strength training
Intense yoga (NOT BIKRAM!!!)
Pilates
Barre

Ideal times:

Keep it early during the first half, and then transition into the early evening. You might still feel full of energy during the first days of your luteal phase, so feel free to keep kicking butt in more intense workouts early in the day. But if you start to experience PMS symptoms in the days before your period, it's time to tone it down and switch to Pilates or strength training in the early evening. Restorative (yin) yoga before bed can also be hugely helpful in combating issues like moodiness and bloat.

Phase 4: Menstrual

Workout suggestions:

Walking
Napping (really!)
Yin Yoga
Myofacial stretching

Keep your workouts mild, even if you're not feeling major discomfort. Your energy will be at its lowest in the beginning of your period, so take it easy! Feel free to pick it up when you have more energy later in the week.

Ideal times:

An evening stroll or pre-bedtime yin yoga session is the perfect way to get some simple movement.

Keep track of your workouts and how you're feeling in your Daily Tracker and report in on the online community! Our guest workout teachers are excited to share their expertise with you there.