

Have you ever noticed that during some times of the month you feel like your relationship is fantastic and others you would really just like your partner to go away? Or maybe you have questions about period sex and what that entails. Sex and intimacy is an important part of romantic relationships, but it can also be one of the larger sources of fights and relationship dissatisfaction. Keep reading to learn more about how the hormone changes that happen in the four phases of your menstrual cycle can affect your relationship and what you can do to make it more positive.

Working With the 4 Phases of Your Menstrual Cycle

Learning what's happening with your hormones and your body within the four phases of your menstrual cycle can help you better understand what you're experiencing physically and mentally. It can also give you important insights into what's happening with your relationship and sex life. You can read through the following information alone, but you might also want to consider asking your partner to look at it with you. This can ensure that you both understand what's going on and encourage open dialogue and questions about your menstrual cycle and the effect it has on sex and intimacy. We've added some questions you can use to help create a more open dialogue between you and your partner.

Menstrual Phase

The menstrual phase is what most women refer to as their period. It's the first 5-7 days of your cycle usually, and it's when you are experiencing menstrual bleeding. During this phase, estrogen, testosterone, and progesterone levels are all low, so you may experience low energy levels and low sex drive and generally just feel like staying home and watching a movie under a blanket on the sofa.

One of the main issues that can come up during this phase is period shame. If you're not comfortable talking openly with your partner about your period, sending them to the store to buy period products, or being honest about how you feel and what you want to do, it can create relationship tension and make you feel less connected to your partner. Some couples may also find that they deal with differing preferences on whether they're comfortable having period sex.

In general, it's perfectly safe and normal to have sex while you're on your period. However, open and honest communication is the key step here. The more you can start to talk about these things with your partner, the closer you can be to feeling more connected and developing some practical solutions to problems you're facing. However, it may be a good idea to wait until you're not on your period to start these conversations if it's not something you've talked about before. Pick a time when you're both feeling good and nothing else is more pressing, and try to start the conversation from a cooperative perspective, such as "This is an issue for me, and I was hoping we could brainstorm some solutions together."

Discussion Opportunities

- What are your feelings about period sex?
- What worries or concerns do you have?
- How might the surrounding culture and your upbringing have influenced your feelings on period sex?
- What are some nonsexual things that could help us feel more connected during this time?

Follicular Phase

The follicular phase is the time from the end of your period to when you ovulate — usually around days 6-13. In this phase, you have a dramatic increase in the amount of estrogen being produced. You may find that you feel more positive about your relationship and more connected to your partner during this time. Rising testosterone levels toward the end of the follicular phase as ovulation approaches can also lead to an increase in sex drive.

If you are trying to achieve or avoid a pregnancy, it's important to pay very close attention to your follicular phase. Your fertile window is the day of ovulation and the 5 days before, which will be in the follicular phase. Having sex during this time can increase your chances of getting pregnant, and it also means that you should be using a reliable contraceptive method if you're wanting to avoid a pregnancy.

When it comes to intimacy, you can take advantage of this time when you're feeling good and have higher levels of estrogen by fitting in more time to bond with your partner. You may find that this phase of your cycle is an especially good time to have difficult conversations or tackle challenging topics, and it's also a good time to plan more active dates such as hiking when your energy levels are at their peak.

Discussion Opportunities

- How do you feel about having children now or in the future?
- Are you happy with our current method of birth control or is there something else you would like to investigate?
- How would you rate our relationship currently?
- What suggestions do you have for how we could make our relationship even better?
- What's an activity we haven't done before but that you would enjoy for a date night?

Ovulation Phase

Your ovulation phase is really just one day — usually in the middle of your cycle — and it's when your ovary releases the egg that was developed during the follicular phase. Testosterone levels increase dramatically during ovulation, as well as the day before and after, so you'll likely notice an increase in sex drive during this time.

Some women may be concerned by increases in cervical fluid around this time or be embarrassed to be intimate with their partners because they're afraid they have an infection or that something is wrong with them. However, this increase in cervical fluid is normal and is actually your body making it easier for the sperm to get to the egg. Some women may find that sex is more comfortable during this time because of the increase in natural lubrication.

Discussion Opportunities

- What types of things or activities make you more interested in sex?
- What stops you from being interested in sex?
- What are three nonsexual things that make you feel more connected to me?

Luteal Phase

The luteal phase is the final phase of the menstrual cycle, and it goes from the day after ovulation to the first day of your next period. Estrogen and progesterone levels rise and then decrease again during this phase, which divides into two mini phases. During the first half of the menstrual cycle, you may notice a decrease in energy or feeling like you want to do date night in instead of heading out. The second half of the luteal phase is the time when most women experience symptoms of PMS.

You may find that physical symptoms, such as cramping, bloating, and breast tenderness, make you feel less like being intimate with your partner, and that emotional symptoms like mood swings and irritability leave you feeling more relationship dissatisfaction. While this can be challenging, you can work *with* this phase of your cycle by:

- Avoiding tackling big relationship issues
- Spending more time at home
- Connecting with your partner physically such as getting a foot massage or cuddling on the couch for a movie

When it comes to fertility, this is also an important time. If you're trying to avoid a pregnancy, you can use fertility charting to learn how to identify when you're safe during this phase to have unprotected sex without worrying about getting pregnant. If you're trying to get pregnant, late in your luteal phase is when you might notice some first signs of pregnancy, such as breast tenderness and implantation spotting, or be able to take a pregnancy test.

Discussion Opportunities

- I'd like to talk to you a little bit about what I experience the week before my period.
- Can you share with me what things you notice about this time in my cycle?
- What's your ideal date night in?
- What would make you feel loved and supported?

Sex, intimacy, and the menstrual cycle can all be sensitive topics, but they don't have to stay hidden in the taboo culture. Understanding what's going on during your cycle and how the four phases can affect your sex life and relationship with your partner can help you open the door to these conversations and start bringing these topics back out into the light. If you're ready to learn more about your menstrual cycle and how you can support it all month long, check out [CLIENT].

Sources:

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/menstrual-cycle>

<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-16167/get-to-know-the-4-phases-of-your-menstrual-cycle.html>

<https://womeninbalance.org/about-hormone-imbalance/>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/womens-health/in-depth/menstrual-cycle/art-20047186>

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/10132-normal-menstruation>

https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/family_planning/21appendices.ppt

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/menstrual-cycle>

<https://www.bloodandmilk.com/heres-how-the-four-phases-of-the-menstrual-cycle-may-affect-your-sex-life/>

<https://www.mindbodygreen.com/0-16167/get-to-know-the-4-phases-of-your-menstrual-cycle.html>