

WOMEN'S HORMONAL CYCLE & THE WORKPLACE

Understanding how hormones affect wellbeing, energy and performance across the menstrual cycle

The average menstrual cycle is **21–35 days** (~28 days is typical). Oestrogen, progesterone, FSH and LH fluctuate in a predictable pattern across **four phases**, influencing mood, focus, energy, resilience and physical symptoms. Awareness of these patterns supports self-advocacy, flexible working, and wellbeing at work.

1 MENSTRUAL PHASE

Days 1–5 Bleeding begins · Lower energy period

HORMONES

↓ Oestrogen ↓ Progesterone ↑ Prostaglandins

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Uterine lining sheds as oestrogen and progesterone drop
- Prostaglandins cause uterine contractions — can cause cramps, back pain, nausea
- Iron loss may contribute to fatigue and brain fog
- Pain tolerance is at its lowest in the cycle

At work: Deep focus or high-stakes tasks may feel harder. This is a good time for reflection, admin, or solo work. Access to comfort (warmth, rest breaks) can help manage symptoms.

2 FOLLICULAR PHASE

Days 1–13 Overlaps with menstrual · Energy rebuilds

HORMONES

↑ FSH ↑ Oestrogen (rising) ↓ Progesterone (low)

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- FSH stimulates follicle growth in the ovaries; oestrogen rises steadily
- Rising oestrogen boosts serotonin — mood lifts, motivation increases
- Cognitive function, verbal fluency and creativity tend to peak
- Physical energy, confidence and sociability climb

At work: Often the most productive phase — ideal for new projects, brainstorming, networking, presentations, and high-complexity tasks.

3 OVULATION PHASE

~Day 14 24–48 hr window · Peak performance

HORMONES

↑↑ LH surge ↑ Oestrogen (peak) ↑ Testosterone

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- LH surge triggers egg release; testosterone adds to drive and assertiveness
- Communication skills, empathy and charisma are heightened
- Physical strength and pain tolerance are at their highest
- Body temperature rises slightly (~0.2–0.5°C) after ovulation

At work: Peak time for negotiations, leadership moments, public speaking and collaborative work. High energy supports ambitious goals and team engagement.

4 LUTEAL PHASE

Days 15–28 Post-ovulation · PMS possible in late phase

HORMONES

↑ Progesterone ↓ Oestrogen (late) ↓ Serotonin (late)

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Progesterone rises, causing a calmer but more inward-looking energy
- Late phase: oestrogen and serotonin fall, which can trigger PMS symptoms
- Common symptoms: bloating, breast tenderness, mood changes, fatigue, anxiety, food cravings
- Detail-oriented thinking may sharpen; creativity can be reflective and analytical

At work: Good phase for detail-focused work, reviewing, editing and planning. In late luteal, reduced capacity is real — managing workload, stress and sleep becomes especially important.