

Miranda Gray

Women's writer, artist, facilitator, menstrual and spiritual teacher



Menstrual cycle dieting

Ask any woman if she wants to lose weight, or if she is dieting, and the chances are she'll say 'yes'. A huge multi-billion dollar industry is built around this simple fact - but if diets, diet and exercise regimes and diet products all worked there would be no multi-billion dollar industry. Anyone who wanted to lose weight would have lost it and kept the weight off!

So often we believe that we fail to lose weight because we feel we don't have enough will-power. We don't seem to be able to manage to restrict our calories, only eat cabbage soup or do the 60-minute power regime at the gym every morning. It is however the dieting industry that fails us. It expects women to be the same person all the time, with the same physical needs and abilities, the same mental and emotional needs and the same motivation. It creates regimes that require consistency. But women are not consistent - **we are cyclic!**

The fundamental cause of failing to lose weight is not our will-power but our lack of understanding about our cyclic nature and how to live a fully female life. We fail to listen to the cyclic needs of our body and the cyclic needs of our motivation and desires, and we also ignore the core inner need beneath 'shielding ourselves' with additional weight.

When we understand our cyclic nature and our needs we can adjust our lifestyle to live in tune with them. We can do the 'right' things at the 'right' time and know when to explore the core issues behind our lives and our weight to receive inspiration and guidance. The result is happiness and well-being, and eating and exercising in harmony with our body, mind and emotions.

The menstrual cycle diet and exercise approach

During the month we can experience different levels of energy, abilities and emotional needs and drives. These groups of days called *Optimum Times* approximately match the four phases of the menstrual cycle. When we match our activities and expectations with these *Optimum Times* and take two simple approaches to food, we have the ability to create a lifestyle regime that we can live month after month.

A simple approach to food:

As the body naturally needs different levels of nutrients and calories during the month the keys to cyclic eating are:

- Give yourself permission to eat anything your body wants when you are hungry
- Stop when you are full.

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The cyclic approach

So how can we live and eat in tune with our cycles and have healthy and happy lives?

The pre-ovulation phase (around days 7 – 14)

The pre-ovulation phase is a time of high energy, activity and positive thinking. This is the time to start your cyclic dieting regime. Get out and get active. Do an aerobics class, get the trainers out and do a bit of jogging, walk to work rather than use the car, or spend 20 minutes in the evening dancing to your favourite music. You will find that you have the stamina and motivation to exercise for longer and increase your repetitions at the gym. Enjoy this active 'you' and how great and positive you feel about yourself!

Notice the foods that your body wants to eat and really enjoy all the flavours. You may be so active that you don't stop to eat properly, so eat a little and often when you feel hungry but eat slowly and savour every delicious mouth full.

In this phase our natural motivation is to 'do something', so start new projects, get out more, exercise, start a new lifestyle and take the first steps towards your weight loss goals. Take action and you will feel good and positive about yourself because you are acting in tune with your natural motivation.

The ovulation phase (around days 15 – 21)

As we enter the ovulation phase our energies soften, and although we can still feel very active and confident, we are less driven. This phase can be very sensual and caring, and our motivation for this phase is other people. Go to an exercise class to meet your 'social' needs rather than exercise alone in the gym.

Our motivation is also centred on doing things for others, so get your exercise by taking the neighbour's dog for a walk, doing a fun run, or walking the children to school.

In this phase preparing food and sharing food becomes a loving and caring act. Many women naturally want to bake in this phase! Have friends over for supper, have a barbeque or picnic, make your family something special, and eat your food with love and appreciation for the exquisite sensual tastes and textures. Take your partner and food into the bedroom for a fun evening in - **sex is always good exercise!**

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The pre-menstrual phase (around days 22 – bleeding)

During the pre-menstrual phase we can experience a decline in our physical energy and stamina, often making many activities a real effort. We are naturally entering a time of rest for our mind, emotions and our bodies.

Many women can experience high levels of frustration and stress during this phase and doing something physical is a safe way to release it; however, with declining physical stamina any physical exertion should only last as long as it takes to release our frustration. Avoid classes and gym regimes that don't fit in with the amount of natural stamina you have or you will become more stressed rather than less.

We can also feel more withdrawn and anti-social in this phase and are naturally reluctant to go to a class or the gym. Listen to your body and feelings and don't force yourself.

Our motivation in this phase is often tied up with intolerance and the need to fix problems. In this phase we can become very intolerant of mess and disorder, so we use this time to do a full Spring clean from attic to basement. You will be amazed at how much exercise you get just by doing the things natural to this phase! With your natural 'intolerant' motivation focused outside of yourself and fulfilled, you can then eat with love and contentment in a 'job well done'. Like the pre-ovulation phase try to eat little and often as this will help keep negative 'low blood-sugar' feelings to a minimum.

In the pre-menstrual phase it is so important to listen very carefully to what your body really wants to eat, and to when it is full. Our bodies can naturally 'crave' the nutrients and calories we need; however, buried negative emotions and thoughts can easily come to the surface and we often try to smoothen them in 'happy foods', foods that give us a chemical 'high'. Our emotions are messages from deep within to remind us that we need to nurture our feelings of self-love. The way out is not to bury our feelings, or even to analyse them, but to encourage feelings of self-acceptance, forgiveness, love and letting go. The motivation for this phase is also 'me' time, so give yourself permission to slow down and find new ways to nurture yourself.

The menstrual phase (day 1 – around day 6)

As the menstrual phase starts we can often experience very low physical, mental and emotional energies. We may naturally wish to eat less, or choose simpler foods, as our digestion takes a rest. Don't try to maintain your usual meal routines, follow what your body wants. Take time to eat slowly and really savour the simple flavours.

This is the natural rest and restoration phase of the cycle, and if we don't rest we can experience less energy in the following phases. Try to change your activities to only doing

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the highest priorities. Avoid using caffeine to see you through this phase. Imagine if you went without rest for a few days and kept going on caffeine - would you be working at your peak performance? The same is true of us over-riding our rest phase. Your natural motivation for this phase is rest, so enjoy it!

When we rest in this phase, we not only feel happier because we are meeting the needs of the phase but we are also able to connect with our deeper intuition to find out what we really need in life to feel happy. We can ask for the reason behind our pre-menstrual emotional messages, what feels 'right' or 'wrong' in our lives, and we can build the commitment to change things when we pick up in energy again. This is the time to ask yourself why you need the extra weight you are carrying - what is your body protecting you from, and what do you need to change in your life to live in tune with your deepest feelings?

Use this phase to commit to creating the life you want, and to following a cyclic approach to food and exercise in the month ahead. As the physical and mental energies return in the pre-ovulation phase and you feel confident and renewed, it is time to get out and get active again!

The way ahead

Working with the cyclic approach to diet and exercise is different for every woman and we have to make compromises to fit in with the world around us. However, the more we can live within our cyclic nature and interact actively with our changing physical, emotional and motivational needs, the more we are able to avoid stress-eating - eating to a regime and routine which is unnatural and unhelpful to us - and the more we can create feelings of well-being and contentment.

Making your cycle work for you

If you want to explore how to live in tune with your cycle, how to use your monthly cycle to support your goals including your weight loss goals, and to discover and change the underlying limiting beliefs you have about yourself, read 'The Optimized Woman' by Miranda Gray.

