

The smart way to hack your hormones

FITNESS

Timing is everything in a new series of workouts that sync with your monthly cycle, says **Joanna Taylor**

CAN'T face another spin class? Stuck in a rut with running? Your body may be trying to tell you something — it might not be the right time of the month for you to be doing that particular type of exercise. Finally, experts have realised that what we eat, how we exercise and what we put on our skin is linked to our hormones and changing it according to our cycle can make a huge difference.

According to kinesiologist and hormone specialist Claire Snowdon-Darling, the menstrual cycle is made up of four approximately weekly stages; the menstruation, follicular, ovulation and luteal phases, all having a different impact on the body. During different parts of these phases everything fluctuates, from susceptibility to pain, to sex

drive and anxiety levels. A recent study by exercise app Strava and St Mary's University reported that 74 per cent of active women have experienced a negative effect on performance as a result of their menstrual cycle.

The London-based fitness studio **Psytle** has reacted by creating **Psytle With Your Psytle**, a carefully-timed mix of spinning, barre, yoga and strength conditioning classes to “period-proof” female fitness regimes and decrease inflammation, improve blood flow and increase energy levels using endorphins. Psytle’s Head of Ride, Alana Murrin, says that maintaining a fitness regime at the most taxing part of the menstrual cycle can have huge benefits. “Even though instinctively you might want to curl up on the sofa, the endorphins you get from moving your body can be pain reducing and pleasure inducing. It’s about adapting your workouts in a way that honours your body.”

Snowdon-Darling says that making the change will enable women to exercise better. “Our hormones have a dramatic effect on our ability to exercise. When hormones are low we are able to access stored carbohydrates in our muscles and liver to go hard and fast.

This is the perfect time for running, big cardio workouts and HIIT. During the high

hormone phase — days 14-28 — we switch to fat-burning mode for fuel. This is where we need to look at more endurance-based steady exercise. When we are bleeding we sometimes feel quite sluggish so being really gentle with ourselves is important, this is



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the time for yoga, swimming and walking or low-level cardio.”

Similarly, Fitness studio **P.Volve** has created the Phase and Function plan, but has taken it one step further by encouraging users to follow a specially designed meal plan “to provide specific nutrients that help achieve hormone balance and mitigate PMS symptoms”, says Amy Martin, executive VP of marketing at the brand. Feedback from users is positive, with one stating that using the combination rid of her period-induced migraines entirely. Although according to Snowdon-Darling, “the best way to ensure a smooth cycle is to have a consistent diet where every meal is made up of a protein source with fats, non-starchy carbs and a small amount of starch. This keeps our blood sugars and stress hormones balanced, which in turn keeps our cycle

healthy.” Recently launched CBD-focused skincare and wellness brand **Fewe** offers a range of products designed to be used at different stages of the menstrual cycle. A £20 **Thirst Trap Serum**, for example, has soothing and hydrating aloe vera and hyaluronic acid, to be applied during the menstruation part of the cycle, when skin is likely to be dry and inflamed.

The **Dream A Little Dream Adaptogen infused oil spray**, costing £16, utilises chamomile, valerian and cherry extracts with the aim of regulating sleep patterns which can fluctuate during the luteal cycle due to abrupt withdrawals of progesterone.

At £25, the **I Touch Myself Rebalancing and Soothing CBD Vulva Serum**, was formulated to relieve some of the dryness and irritation around the vulva during the ovulation phase.

When it comes to the CBD aspect of the brand, Snowdon-Darling says it could be worthwhile.

“CBD is still being researched, but we do know that it has huge impacts on inflammation and pain so using it to relieve menstrual cramping could be beneficial and some people report a positive effect on mood, so it could help with PMS.

“Though always remember that periods really shouldn’t cause too much discomfort and if they do it is worth speaking to a specialist practitioner to see how this can be resolved.”

Stretch yourself: yoga can ease period pain. Right, P.Volve instructors

