

THE MENSTRUAL MANUAL FOR MEN



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By Lily Aagren

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Dedicated to my beautiful partner Luke, thank you for supporting me to be a blood activist.

INTRODUCTION:

"The menstrual cycle itself mirrors how consciousness becomes matter and how thought creates reality"

-Christine Northrup.

Dearest men, women, humans, anyone of any gender reading this. Thank you. It is such an honourable act to take the time to learn about the menstrual cycle, our blood connection to life and death. Menstrual blood is healing and sacred, it ties us into the cycles of nature. As you start to become more attuned to this beautiful monthly building and shedding that all women are going through from puberty to menopause, you may start to notice yourself drawing parallels to the phases of the moon, the seasons, and everything that grows and dies.

I want to acknowledge all those that bleed and do not identify as a women. Using the language of 'she' and 'woman' is not meant to be exclusive, but as a way to encompass all those that menstruate.

Each page of this manual is dedicated to one of the four seasons of the monthly cycle. To make the most of the information that I will share with you it is helpful to start tracking, or taking note of, which day of her cycle the woman in your life is on. You can do this on your calendar, phone or even download an app. Check if they are comfortable with you doing this, but they will most probably be so happy that you are showing interest. Day one is the first day of bleeding, and you continue counting until the next bleed. Every woman will have a different length of bleeding time, ovulation and length of cycle. These change from cycle to cycle. One cycle may be 28 days, the next 27, the next 32.

Feel free to use this as a template, all the information that is shared here is based on my personal experiences of bleeding and what has been helpful to me. Every woman is different and will have specific needs and requests unique to their own body. Work together to create a guide for the best possible support.

DAY 1- 5, MENSTRUATION, BLEEDING ~ WINTER

Imagine bleeding is like waking up at midnight and everyone is going around as if it's 9am, but you just want to go back to sleep. This might give you some perspective on the intensity of bleeding. Many women experience intense cramping and pain during the first few days, and because all the energy is moving downwards and inside the pelvis, women may also experience headaches and dizziness.

Physiologically the body is shedding the uterine layers which were made to grow a baby in, so there can be some grief acknowledged or unacknowledged. I liken this time to winter because there might be a strong desire to go inward, to hibernate. Trees are bare of leaves in Winter and all the energy goes down into the roots, this is a time for them to rest so that they can come back with fresh new growth in Spring. Women need this time. Without the winter there can be no summer.

FOODS & HERBS: On the first day the energy in the womb is the most intense, I often don't feel hungry and it can be a good time to fast so the body doesn't have to expend extra energy digesting. The most supportive foods to eat are ones that are easily digestible and warm. Soups with whole grains and root vegetables are recommended and it is best to avoid cold food and drinks during this time. Cramps can often be caused by cold in the lower back or womb, so grated fresh ginger tea is a wonderful way to encourage circulation and ease cramping pain. Red raspberry leaf can be wonderful for cramps. Fennel is a great one for abdominal discomfort and bloating.

WAYS TO SUPPORT: During bleeding day 1 & 2, small tasks can feel overwhelming so cooking more and helping with household work is an amazing way to show support during this time. She might need some clothes washed if she uses reusable cloth pads or has leaked blood on her underwear. If you get a chance to connect with the blood, that is wonderful, it is the most beautiful and sacred of fluids. Some women, (myself included) find it hard to surrender to a bleed completely and instead keep working and going about life at full pace. Therefore, it is wonderful to receive permission or a reminder from those closest to us that we are allowed to rest. Even the smallest acts of kindness, like running a bath and having someone bringing me a hot water bottle is greatly appreciated. On the first day of my period I often have less energy to give to those around me, so having a little bit of space from my partner is appreciated. Spending time alone to meditate, journal or rest can be the most fulfilling. If a woman condenses her energy output throughout this sacred and special time, this will allow her to be in her fullest potential throughout the rest of the month.

Some women like making love while they bleed, and it can be a powerful way of sharing the blood with their partner, but it is important to remember that the yoni is quite often extra sensitive so go gently and slowly. It might also be a time where she is not feeling like being sexually intimate with a partner, so it is very important to respect this.

DAY 6 TO 12 ~ THE FOLLICULAR PHASE ~ SPRING

This is an exciting time. Spring has an intoxicating newness. When I finish my bleed I often feel like I've just gotten out of a beautiful fresh stream and I am charged and excited for the potential of life. I often get ideas for projects during menstruation, and when spring arrives I am ready to start with clearer mental functioning.

Physiologically the body is starting to build the lining of the uterus in preparation for ovulation (the release of an egg). Estrogen builds. Relationship issues or things that were difficult within a dynamic may be easier to resolve now. Male partners if you have been feeling neglected or pushed away, be patient until this time. It will pay off!

FOODS AND HERBS: In Chinese medicine this phase is about building yin, which is blood and tissue. After bleeding the body will need lots of nutrients and goodness to restore blood. If the woman in your life eats meat this might be a good time to have some bone broths, fish, eggs and liver. Vegetarians and vegans can have shitake mushrooms, beetroots, miso and seaweed. Supportive herbs: All of the dark leafy greens, especially nettle tea, to build iron.

WAYS TO SUPPORT: This is a great time to reconnect, to have a check in and discuss areas of a relationship you might want to repair or work on. Laughter and light-hearted play is a great way to re-establish connection. If you are in a relationship with a woman this might be a nice time for more intimacy and cuddling or planning an adventure together. However, it is a good idea not to take on too much at this stage. Spring growth is still delicate and new, so go slowly.

DAY 12-14 ~ OVULATION ~ SUMMER

If you imagine a flower that has just bloomed, the scent is amazing. All the bees are drawn to the nectar. This is ovulation, women can feel magnetic and powerful. The body releases hormones to attract a mate at this time, so woman may feel their most attractive and are noticed by others around them. Physiologically there is a surge in follicle stimulating and luteinising hormones, as well as a little bit of testosterone. The body releases an egg from the fallopian tube in the hope of being fertilized. Sexual and creative energy also peak.

This is reflected in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), where the Yang (masculine) energy is rising. In Ayurvedic medicine this means that Pitta (fire) is building. With this yang or masculine energy present, I usually feel like I can accomplish anything, I am my most confident and social. This is when women who bleed can often feel 'normal', I think this is because society today does not really make space for anything other than high performing, productive and outwardly achieving people. I believe that we need to appreciate all of the stages of the menstrual cycle for their unique and valuable lessons, and that this powerful summertime phase only exists because there has been a winter and a spring.

FOODS AND HERBS: There is lots of fire present in the body during ovulation, and this is a good time to be eating lighter foods and meals like salads, fresh fruits and lightly cooked grains and vegetables. Shatavari is an herb used to support for the female reproductive system, especially during ovulation. It is a cooling and bitter herb which can help to balance out the fire of ovulation, as well as being grounding and building to support the release of an egg. Liquorice is another slightly more common herb which is also cooling and sweet and supports the adrenals.

WAYS TO SUPPORT: This is the time to celebrate and encourage the women in your life to go after their goals. This is also a wonderful time to go on an adventure together or out to a party. Dancing and spending time with my friends or partner is something that I love to do when ovulating, because it can be a way of expressing all of the creative and sexual energy which is blooming.

DAY 15 TO BLEED ~ THE LUTEAL PHASE ~ AUTUMN

Just like the trees begin to prepare for winter by losing their leaves, women also experience a process of letting go during the luteal phase. This distinct stage has sometimes been referred to as 'Premenstrual Syndrome' or PMS. I feel that labelling a natural stage in the body as a "syndrome" may lead to a feeling of not being understood or worthy. The saying 'We are our own worst critics' can be especially true at this time, and negative language around women's feelings and experiences can be alienating.

Christine Northrup in her book *Women's Bodies Women's Wisdom* talks about this being a time of greater intuition and the veils between the conscious and unconscious worlds becoming thinner. This could be why women tend to cry more, or feel sudden bursts of anger, which although perceived as negative is rather just a natural process of emotions. Feeling empowered to assert boundaries and communicate needs that might not have been realised until the Autumn phase are a powerful gift.

Physiologically the body has released an egg which wasn't fertilized, and the hormones estrogen and progesterone start to rise. TCM calls this liver heat rising and women may experience bloating, pimples and aches and pains arising. It can be helpful to remember that this is just the changing of seasons and this too will pass.

FOOD & HERBS: Often women will have sugar cravings at this time, but that can overload the liver which is already processing hormones. Best to avoid alcohol, sugar and coffee, they can be aggravating to an already sensitive emotional state. Green tea is a good caffeine alternative.

Dandelion root or leaf tea is a wonderful bitter tonic for the liver and helps with excess heat after ovulation. Milk thistle is another beautiful herb to help the liver with balancing hormonal levels. St. John's wort can be helpful for any depression or sadness experienced, but it is my encouragement to sit with whatever emotions are arising and allow them to pass through. Milky oats are a beautiful nervine tonic to include to support the nervous system.

WAYS TO SUPPORT: A great suggestion I heard from this talk (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwbywrE3gHo>) was that during this time compliments and reassurance can be really helpful, give it a go! This is a time when women may be feeling their most vulnerable, so it is always a great time to help her feel good about herself. Giving compliments and reassurances will not go unnoticed. It is a good time to spend doing some activities together such as running or partner yoga with lot's twists, which is great for moving the energy in the liver and gallbladder. Twisting can also be helpful in releasing pent up frustration or anger. Having compassion and patience if you are feeling like the woman in your life is being irrational or overly emotional is very important. Offering a massage might be helpful, although be prepared to receive feedback!

FURTHER READING:

BOOKS:

Women's Bodies Women's Wisdom - Christine Northrup

Wild Power - Alexandra Pope & Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer

Healing Wise - Susan Weed

Vagina - Naomi Wolff

Yoni Shakti - Uma Tuli