



CYCLE

Syncing for Beginners

Contents

Introduction

01 Your Cycle Is Your Superpower

02 Phase One, Menstrual: Rest, Replenish, Restore

03 Phase Two, Follicular: Rise, Refresh, Begin

04 Phase Three, Ovulatory: Radiate, Connect, Shine

05 Phase Four, Luteal: Soften, Sustain, Go Inward

Your Complete Guide to Eating & Living in Harmony with Your Hormones

Hey there, beauty,

Can I let you in on something that changed everything for me?

For years, I pushed through exhaustion, wondered why some weeks I felt unstoppable and others I could barely get off the couch, and convinced myself I just needed to "be more consistent." Sound familiar?

Here's what nobody told me: I wasn't being inconsistent. I was ignoring a brilliantly intelligent system that had been running inside my body my entire life, my menstrual cycle.

Your cycle isn't just about your period. It's a monthly rhythm of four distinct hormonal phases, each one shifting your energy, metabolism, mood, and nutritional needs in meaningful ways. When you learn to work *with* those shifts instead of against them, everything changes. Your energy stabilises. Your cravings start to make sense. Your body starts to feel like home again.

That's what cycle syncing is, and it's one of the most empowering tools I've ever come across in my years as a nutritionist and a woman.

This ebook is your beginner's guide to understanding your four phases and how to nourish and support your body through each one. It's not about rules, restrictions, or doing it perfectly. It's about building a relationship with your body that's rooted in curiosity, kindness, and real science.

You don't need to overhaul your life. You just need to start listening.

I'm so glad you're here.

Ash x

Your Cycle Is Your Superpower

● The Hormonal Rhythm You Were Never Taught About

Let's start with the truth: most of us were taught very little about our menstrual cycles beyond the basics of menstruation. We learned about periods, maybe a little about reproduction, and that was pretty much it. Nobody handed us a guide to the hormonal symphony playing out inside our bodies every single month.

So if you've spent years feeling confused, frustrated, or out of sync with yourself, that makes complete sense. You were never given the full picture.

Here it is.

Your menstrual cycle is divided into four distinct phases, each governed by shifting levels of key hormones, primarily estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, and FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone). These hormonal changes don't just affect your reproductive system. They influence your brain chemistry, your metabolism, your energy levels, your gut health, your sleep, your mood, and even how you process carbohydrates and fats.

In other words? Your nutritional and lifestyle needs genuinely change throughout the month. And honouring those changes is the foundation of cycle syncing.

Key Insight

Research shows that estrogen and progesterone receptors exist throughout the gut lining, meaning your hormones directly influence digestion, gut motility, and the gut microbiome, and vice versa. Your gut and your hormones are in constant conversation.

● The Four Phases at a Glance



Before we dive deep, here's a simple overview of your cycle's four phases. Cycle length varies from woman to woman, the "28-day cycle" is an average, not a rule, so treat these day ranges as a guide, not a rigid schedule. A healthy menstrual cycle is usually between about 24 and 38 days, but what matters most is that it's regular for you and that ovulation is happening.

- **Menstrual Phase (Days 1-5):** Your period arrives. Estrogen and progesterone are at their lowest. This is a time for rest, reflection, and gentle nourishment.
- **Follicular Phase (Days 6-13):** Estrogen begins rising as your body prepares to release an egg. Energy and creativity start to climb.
- **Ovulatory Phase (Days 14-17):** Estrogen peaks, testosterone surges briefly, and you feel your most outwardly vibrant and connected.
- **Luteal Phase (Days 18-28):** Progesterone rises to support a potential pregnancy. Energy begins to turn inward; your body's nutritional demands increase.

Think of your cycle as four seasons playing out within your own body every month. Your bleed (menstruation) is your winter, slow, quiet, restorative. Follicular is your spring, fresh, light, full of new energy. Ovulation is your summer, radiant, social, expansive. Luteal is your autumn, productive but inward-turning, calling for extra care.

When you start to see your cycle as seasons rather than inconveniences, everything shifts.

Why Cycle Syncing Works

Cycle syncing is the practice of aligning your food choices, movement, work habits, social life, and self-care with the natural rhythms of your hormonal cycle. It's not a diet. It's not a rigid protocol. It's a framework for listening to your body with intention.

Top Tip

You don't need to track every symptom or eat perfectly in every phase to benefit from cycle syncing. Even one or two small adjustments, like eating more iron-rich foods during your period or adding complex carbohydrates in your luteal phase, can make a noticeable difference to how you feel.

The science behind it is grounded in what we know about how estrogen and progesterone influence energy metabolism, insulin sensitivity, neurotransmitter production, and gut function. As these hormones rise and fall, your body's requirements genuinely shift, and responding to those shifts with targeted nutrition and lifestyle support is one of the most evidence-based things you can do for your hormonal health.

It's also, for many women, the first time they feel truly at home in their own body.

AT A GLANCE

	MENSTRUAL Days 1-5	FOLLICULAR Days 6-13	OVULATORY Days 14-16	LUTEAL Days 17-28
Energy	Low, rest	Building	Peak	Declining
Mood	Reflective	Optimistic	Social	Sensitive
Focus on	Rest & iron	Fresh foods	Raw & light	Warming foods
Movement	Gentle yoga	Cardio	HIIT	Pilates

Your Takeaway

Your cycle is not something to manage or push through, it's a source of information, intelligence, and genuine power. Understanding your four phases is the first step to nourishing yourself in a way that actually works for **you**.

Phase One, Menstrual: Rest, Replenish, Restore

Days 1-5 | Winter Energy | Hormone Levels: Low

Your bleed arrives, and along with it comes a very clear message from your body: slow down.

During the menstrual phase, both estrogen and progesterone drop to their lowest levels of the cycle. Your body releases prostaglandins, inflammatory compounds that signal your uterus to contract and shed its lining. This combination of contractions and inflammation is what creates that familiar cramping or mild aching in your lower abdomen, often felt right before and during the first day or two of your bleed. It's real, physical work your body is doing, and it requires energy and nourishment to do it well.

This is not the time to push harder, restrict your eating, or power through exhaustion with caffeine and willpower. This is the time to rest, replenish, and restore.

Nutrition Focus: Iron, Omega-3s, and Warmth

One of the most important nutritional priorities during menstruation is replacing what you lose. Blood loss during your period means your iron levels dip, and low iron can worsen fatigue, brain fog, and mood, symptoms you might currently be chalking up to "just having your period."

Key Insight

Haem iron (found in animal sources) is absorbed at a rate of roughly 15 to 35 percent, while non-haem iron (from plant sources) is absorbed at just 2 to 20 percent. Pairing plant-based iron sources with vitamin C significantly boosts absorption.

Nourishing foods to focus on during your menstrual phase:

- **Iron-rich foods:** Red meat, lamb, sardines, lentils, spinach, pumpkin seeds, tempeh
- **Vitamin C (to enhance iron absorption):** Kiwi fruit, capsicum, citrus, strawberries

- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** Salmon, mackerel, flaxseeds, walnuts, these have natural anti-inflammatory properties that may help ease prostaglandin-driven cramps
- **Warming, cooked foods:** Soups, broths, slow-cooked meals, easy on digestion and deeply nourishing
- **Magnesium-rich foods:** Dark chocolate (yes, really), cacao (over coffee), leafy greens, legumes, almonds, magnesium supports muscle relaxation and may reduce cramping

Top Tip

If you experience significant bloating or digestive discomfort during your period, it's worth knowing that prostaglandins don't just act on your uterus, they also stimulate the gut, which is why many women experience loose stools or cramping in the digestive system too. Warm, easy-to-digest foods and reducing raw, fibrous vegetables temporarily can ease this.

● Movement: Gentle and Restorative

This is not the week to smash a high-intensity circuit class or run a personal best. Your body is working hard internally, and your energy is genuinely lower, not because you're being lazy, but because your physiology is directing resources elsewhere.

Movement that supports your menstrual phase:

- Gentle yoga or yin yoga
- Slow walks in nature
- Stretching and foam rolling
- Intentional, lighter weight training if you feel up to it
- Rest, actual, unapologetic rest

If you genuinely feel good and want to move more, honour that too. This is about listening to your body, not following a rigid rule.

● Mindset and Lifestyle

Introspection comes naturally during this phase. Many women find they crave solitude, quiet, and simplicity. Rather than fighting that pull, lean into it. Cancel the social obligations you don't truly want to attend. Journal. Sleep more. Let yourself be still.

Your bleed is a powerful time for reflection, noticing what's working in your life, what isn't, and what you want more or less of in the cycle ahead.

Your Takeaway

Your period is not an inconvenience, it's a signal. When you rest, replenish with iron and anti-inflammatory foods, and honour your body's natural call to slow down, you lay the foundation for a more energised, balanced month ahead.

Phase Two, Follicular: Rise, Refresh, Begin

Days 6-13 | Spring Energy | Hormones: Estrogen Rising

If the menstrual phase is your winter, the follicular phase is absolutely your spring. Estrogen begins climbing as your pituitary gland releases FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone), stimulating follicles in the ovaries to grow and mature in preparation for ovulation.

And you can *feel* it.

Energy returns. Motivation picks up. Your mind feels clearer, your mood lifts, and you might notice a renewed desire to try new things, start projects, and connect with people. This is one of the most estrogen-driven phases of your cycle, and estrogen does wonderful things for your brain, boosting serotonin, dopamine, and cognitive function.

Worth remembering, though: estrogen is still building during this phase. The transition out of menstruation isn't a switch you flip overnight. Your body is gently easing back into its rising-energy state, and that takes a few days. There's no need to push yourself to bounce back the moment your bleed ends. Listen to what your body is asking for, and let your energy return on its own timeline.

This is your season for beginnings.

Nutrition Focus: Light, Fresh, and Gut-Supportive

During the follicular phase, estrogen's rise has a positive effect on insulin sensitivity, meaning your body is generally better at processing carbohydrates efficiently. Your metabolism is slightly lower than in the luteal phase, and many women naturally feel less hungry, that's normal and expected.

This is a beautiful time to enjoy lighter, fresher foods and focus on supporting the gut microbiome, because a healthy gut helps metabolise estrogen efficiently via a process involving the estrobolome (the collection of gut bacteria responsible for estrogen metabolism).

Key Insight

The estrobolome, the group of gut microbes that metabolise estrogen, plays a direct role in hormonal balance. A diverse, fibre-rich diet supports a healthy estrobolome, helping your body process and eliminate excess estrogen effectively.

Foods to focus on during your follicular phase:

- **Fermented foods:** Yoghurt, kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, miso, feed your gut microbiome and support the estrobolome
- **Leafy greens and cruciferous vegetables:** Broccoli, kale, Brussels sprouts, contain compounds that support healthy estrogen metabolism
- **Light proteins:** Eggs, white fish, legumes, edamame
- **Seeds, flaxseeds in particular:** Flaxseeds contain lignans, plant compounds that support healthy estrogen balance and metabolism during the follicular phase
- **Complex carbohydrates:** Quinoa, oats, sweet potato, sustained energy without blood sugar spikes

Top Tip

Try adding a tablespoon of ground flaxseeds or flaxseed meal to your morning porridge, pancakes, or baking during your follicular and ovulatory phases. It's one of the simplest, most evidence-informed nutritional tools for supporting estrogen metabolism.

Movement: Build and Explore

Your energy is rising and your body is primed to take on more physical challenge. This is a great time to try a new exercise class, increase workout intensity, or explore movement you've been curious about.

Great movement choices for the follicular phase:

- Strength training with progressive load
- Cardio, running, cycling, dance classes
- Pilates or barre
- Trying something new, a sport, a class, a hiking trail

Your joints and ligaments are also more flexible during this phase thanks to rising estrogen, which can support mobility work and dynamic movement.

Mindset and Lifestyle

Your follicular phase is your natural planning season. Use the mental clarity and motivation that comes with rising estrogen to map out projects, set intentions, schedule important meetings, or begin something you've been putting off.

This isn't manufactured productivity, it's working with your neurochemistry, not against it.

Your Takeaway

The follicular phase is your fresh start. Nourish your gut, embrace lighter and more energising foods, build your movement back up with curiosity, and use the rising creative energy to begin the things that matter to you.

Phase Three, Ovulatory: Radiate, Connect, Shine

Days 14-17 | Summer Energy | Hormones: Estrogen Peak, Testosterone Surge

Welcome to your summer. The ovulatory phase is brief, typically just three to five days, but it's arguably the most hormonally vibrant window of your entire cycle.

Estrogen reaches its peak just before ovulation, triggering a surge of luteinising hormone (LH) that causes the dominant follicle to release its egg. Testosterone also rises briefly during this phase, adding a layer of confidence, libido, and drive that many women notice quite clearly.

You may feel more talkative, more magnetic, more yourself. Your skin might glow. Your voice might even be slightly more resonant, research has genuinely found subtle changes in vocal quality across the cycle. This is your body in full bloom.

Nutrition Focus: Anti-Inflammatory and Liver-Supportive

During ovulation, your body is working hard, and inflammation can increase slightly around this time. Supporting your liver is also important here, as the liver is responsible for clearing excess estrogen as levels begin to drop post-ovulation.

Key Insight

The liver metabolises estrogen through a two-phase detoxification process. B vitamins, sulphur-containing foods, and antioxidants all support this process, making your dietary choices during the ovulatory phase genuinely impactful for hormonal balance. Foods rich in B vitamins include beef liver, salmon, sardines, dairy, eggs, avocado, leafy greens, legumes, and sunflower seeds. Sulphur-rich foods include eggs, broccoli, garlic, onion, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and leeks. Antioxidants are abundant in berries (blueberries, raspberries, blackberries), dark chocolate, green tea, leafy greens, beetroot, pomegranate, and citrus fruits.

Foods to focus on during your ovulatory phase:

- **Anti-inflammatory foods:** Berries, turmeric, ginger, oily fish, leafy greens

- **Liver-supportive foods:** Cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage), garlic, onion, eggs, beetroot
- **Zinc-rich foods:** Pumpkin seeds, beef, oysters, chickpeas, zinc supports ovulation itself and immune function
- **Light, vibrant meals:** Fresh salads, buddha bowls, smoothies, fresh fruit, you'll likely naturally be drawn to these
- **Adequate fibre:** Supports estrogen excretion through the digestive system

Top Tip

This is a great phase to enjoy your most social meals, share a beautiful buddha bowl at a cafe, host a dinner, or try a new restaurant. Your energy for connection is at its peak, and enjoying food in community is genuinely nourishing.

Movement: Peak Performance

Your pain tolerance is higher, your energy is abundant, and your physical performance tends to peak around ovulation. Estrogen supports muscle growth and stamina, so this is the time to go for your personal best if that's meaningful to you, tackle your most demanding workouts, or lean into high-energy group fitness.

Movement that shines during the ovulatory phase:

- High-intensity interval training (HIIT)
- Heavy strength training
- Competitive sport
- Dancing, group fitness, anything social and energetic

One note of care: estrogen also increases ligament laxity, which can slightly raise injury risk during high-impact activity. Be mindful of hot yoga or any class that encourages over-stretching, and warm up thoroughly before anything dynamic. Listen to your joints.

Mindset and Lifestyle

This is your most outwardly expressive phase. You may feel more confident speaking up, presenting ideas, having difficult conversations, or putting yourself out there socially. Use it.

Schedule your most important presentation, first date, social event, or creative showcase here. Not because you can't do those things at other times, but because right now, your neurochemistry is working beautifully in your favour.

Your Takeaway

Ovulation is your cycle's peak, a time to radiate, connect, and nourish your body with anti-inflammatory, liver-loving foods. Embrace the energy, show up fully, and celebrate what your body is capable of.

Phase Four, Luteal: Soften, Sustain, Go Inward

Days 18-28 | Autumn Energy | Hormones: Progesterone Rising

After ovulation, the ruptured follicle transforms into something called the corpus luteum, which begins producing progesterone. This hormone is often described as the "calming" hormone, and it sets the tone for the entire luteal phase, softer, slower, more inward.

Progesterone has wide-reaching effects: it raises your body temperature slightly, supports calm and stable mood, and prepares the uterus for a potential pregnancy. As progesterone rises through the early luteal phase, you may notice your mind quietens, your need for stillness grows, and your appetite for deep, sustaining food increases.

Around the second half of this phase, both progesterone and estrogen begin to drop. This drop is what triggers your bleed if pregnancy hasn't occurred. It's also what drives the changes many women associate with PMS, the mood shifts, the cravings, the irritability, the bloating. None of it is in your head, and most of it can be supported nutritionally.

This is your autumn season, productive but inward, sustaining rather than expanding.

Nutrition Focus: Stable Blood Sugar, Magnesium, and Sustaining Foods

Key Insight

Your metabolic rate genuinely rises in the luteal phase, by an estimated 100 to 300 calories per day. This is why hunger often increases during the second half of your cycle and why restrictive eating in this phase tends to backfire. Honour the appetite shift, your body is doing more.

The luteal phase is not the time to undereat or skip meals. Your body is working harder, and stable blood sugar is the foundation of feeling well in this phase. Big drops in blood sugar amplify mood swings, fatigue, and cravings.

Foods to focus on during your luteal phase:

- **Complex carbohydrates:** Sweet potato, brown rice, quinoa, oats, sustained energy and serotonin support

- **Magnesium-rich foods:** Dark chocolate, leafy greens, almonds, pumpkin seeds, black beans, supports mood, sleep, and reduces cramping
- **B6-rich foods:** Banana, salmon, chicken, chickpeas, potato, supports neurotransmitter production and helps reduce PMS symptoms
- **Healthy fats:** Avocado, olive oil, nuts, seeds, oily fish, supports hormone production and satiety
- **Warming, slow-cooked foods:** Stews, roasts, casseroles, baked vegetables, gentler on digestion and aligned with your body's autumn-energy preference

Top Tip

Add a tablespoon of pumpkin seeds to your morning routine throughout the luteal phase. Pumpkin seeds are rich in zinc and magnesium, two nutrients that support progesterone production, mood, and sleep in the second half of your cycle. Sunflower seeds are another easy addition, carrying vitamin E and selenium.

● Movement: Strength Early, Soften Late

In the first week of your luteal phase, energy is still relatively high and you may feel strong and steady. Strength training, Pilates, and hiking all suit this window well. As you move closer to your bleed, your body's request will shift, and so should your movement.

Movement that supports the luteal phase:

- **Early luteal:** Strength training, Pilates, hiking
- **Late luteal:** Gentle yoga, walking, swimming, mobility work
- Whatever feels supportive, not punishing

Your body temperature is slightly elevated during this phase, which can make high-intensity exercise feel harder than usual. That's not a sign you're losing fitness, it's a signal to dial back as needed.

● Mindset and Lifestyle

The luteal phase is your natural season for completing, organising, and bringing things to a close. The mental clarity of the follicular phase has evolved into a more focused, detail-oriented state. This is when admin gets done, projects get finished, and homes get tidied.

It's also a time to be especially gentle with yourself. As progesterone drops in the late luteal phase, emotions surface more easily. The things you've been quietly tolerating for weeks tend to feel sharper. This isn't weakness, it's information. Your body is asking you to attend to what needs attention.

Build extra rest into your evenings. Reduce social commitments where you can. Eat nourishing meals. Be patient with yourself.

Your Takeaway

The luteal phase is your reminder that productivity isn't about pushing harder, it's about working with your body's natural rhythm. Honour your increased appetite, lean into nourishing foods, complete what's in front of you, and prepare gently for the bleed to come.

Cycle syncing isn't a perfect practice, and you don't need to do it perfectly to benefit. Even noticing the rhythm of your cycle, even adjusting one meal or one workout, is the beginning of a new relationship with your body.

What I want for you is this: that the next time you wake up tired and wonder what's wrong, you'll check in with where you are in your cycle and know that the answer might simply be your body asking for rest. That when you feel social and bright and creative, you'll trust it as a real shift, not as luck. That when your bleed arrives and your appetite grows and your energy turns inward, you'll honour those signals as wisdom rather than fight them.

Your cycle is not your enemy. It is your superpower. Learning to work with it is one of the most kind, intelligent things you can do for yourself.

If you want to go deeper, I have more comprehensive guides at girlgut.com.au, and my door is always open for a one-on-one consultation.

Ash x

Ready to go deeper?

Explore personalised nutrition plans, 1:1 consultations with Ash,
and more ebooks at girlgut.com.au

