

SMILE!

Your month is about to get a whole lot better. Calcium can help banish PMS, says a study by Columbia University. Aim for 600mg twice a day

Have a great month!

Don't let hormones rule your life – start capitalising on them instead. Louise Pyne shows you how to go with the flow for a happier, healthier cycle

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
1 ✓	2 ✓	3* ✓	4 ✓	5 ✓	6 ✓	7 ✓
8 ✓	9 ✓	10* ✓	11 ✓	12 ✓	13 ✓	14 ✓
15 ✓	16 ✓	17 ✓	18* ✓	19 ✓	20 ✓	21 ✓
22 ✓	23 ✓	24 ✓	25* ✓	26 ✓	27 ✓	28 ✓
29 ✓	30 ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓



YOUR hormones don't just kick into action a few days into a month when you have your period, they have a huge impact on your body every day. Fluctuating hormone levels can leave you elated one moment only to feel on edge and anxious the next. But if you get in tune with your hormones you'll reap some pretty awesome benefits, from better sex to weight loss. Here's how to get cycle-savvy...

Week 1

What's going on? Your cycle begins on the first day you get your period. The pituitary gland, which is located in the brain, secretes follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), sparking the growth of follicles in the ovaries. At this point, your oestrogen and progesterone levels are at their lowest before slowly beginning to rise mid-week. You'll feel... Tired during the first few days of your cycle, due to low oestrogen and progesterone levels, and your iron levels will probably drop as you'll be losing blood. By the middle of the week, fatigue will peter off and you may experience a surge in energy as your oestrogen picks up again. Rock-bottom oestrogen levels early in the week may also trigger a throbbing head, with research suggesting that 5 million of us suffer menstrual migraines during the first three days of a period. 'Low oestrogen has also been linked to a decrease in mental abilities and alertness,' says naturopath Lauren Eyre (revital.co.uk). On the plus side, rising testosterone will give your sex drive a kick. This week the possibility of pregnancy is reduced, although not completely eliminated. Outsmart your hormones by... Increasing your intake of dark green leafy veg such as spinach and kale, which are packed with iron; popping a B-complex supplement such as Biocare B Complex (£6.85, biocare.co.uk) to boost energy levels; rubbing pain-relieving lavender oil onto your temples; and eliminating messiness between the sheets by using a diaphragm. This is the week to... Kick-start your diet. A study by Tufts University found women eat 12 per cent less at the start of their cycle, so it's a great time to start a healthy eating plan.

Week 2

What's going on? As the follicles mature, FSH drops, and there is a surge in luteinising hormone (LH). In a typical 28-day cycle, oestrogen is at its highest levels between days eight and 12, so the second week of the menstrual cycle sees oestrogen hit its peak.

'WOMEN EAT 12% LESS AT THE START OF THEIR CYCLE, SO IT'S A GREAT TIME TO START A HEALTHY NEW EATING PLAN'

'Oestrogen also stimulates the production of aldosterone from the adrenal cortex which influences the kidneys in the regulation of water balance,' explains Lauren. You'll feel... A bit moody and bloated. 'High oestrogen levels often produce varied mental and emotional disturbances, including anxiety, irritability and mood swings,' says Lauren. 'They may also cause the kidneys to retain more water, leading to breast tenderness, abdominal bloating and weight gain.' Not so much fun, then! Outsmart your hormones by... Taking magnesium. 'Magnesium is known as a natural tranquilliser – it has a calming, relaxing effect on the nervous system and has been shown through clinical trials to be very beneficial in the management of pre-menstrual symptoms,' explains Lauren. This important mineral also helps to regulate levels of sodium, helping to banish water retention. Try Pharma Nord Bio-Magnesium (£12.90, nutricentre.com). The herb vitex agnus castus is also thought to help to relieve PMS. This popular remedy works by balancing levels of progesterone and oestrogen. 'Try blending the dried herb with dandelion and infuse in hot water to make a balancing, diuretic tea that will also support liver function,' advises Lauren. This is the week to... Treat yourself. Your hormones may be playing havoc with your emotions so pep yourself up by getting your nails done or splashing out on a new dress.

Week 3

What's going on? In a word: ovulation. 'The beginning of the week is marked by peak levels of FSH and LH, which initiates ovulation,' explains Lauren. 'You may feel a slight pang or twinge in your lower abdominal region, which generally indicates the release of an egg from a follicle into the fallopian tube.' Progesterone also kicks in at this point, which may give you a bigger appetite than usual. You'll feel... Sexy and confident! During ovulation you may notice a peak in sex drive as Mother Nature plays her part in helping you to conceive. You might also feel more self-assured and courageous than usual. A study by the University of Texas found that women generally feel more attractive and passionate and take more care with their appearance when they're ovulating. There is also evidence suggesting that women are naturally perceived as more attractive to the opposite sex at this time, too. A 2007 study published in the journal *Evolution & Human Behaviour* revealed that lap dancers make a

'YOU'LL FEEL MORE SELF-ASSURED, COURAGEOUS AND ATTRACTIVE THAN USUAL WHEN YOU'RE OVULATING'

whopping 80 per cent more money in tips when they're ovulating compared to when they're menstruating. Hello, boys! Outsmart your hormones by... Eating well to combat the appetite-boosting effects of progesterone. Think meals that combine complex carbs and protein to regulate your blood sugar levels and stop you reaching for sugary foods. A wholemeal chicken and salad sandwich or a prawn stir-fry with a side of brown rice are good choices for slow-release energy. And if conceiving is top of your agenda, timing is everything. The best time for sex is two days leading up to ovulation, and the day of ovulation. Once the egg is released from the ovary it can survive for anywhere from 12 to 24 hours, so monitoring this fertile window carefully is the key to improving your chances of success. Look out for the physical signs you may be ovulating such as stretchy vaginal mucous and lower abdominal pain. This is the week to... Make the most of your confidence boost and plan a hot date.

Week 4

What's going on? It's your premenstrual week. After a short peak of oestrogen and progesterone, all your hormones gradually dip and the uterus prepares to shed its lining, known as the endometrium. You'll feel... Not so great, unfortunately. 'The end of this week may be accompanied by uncomfortable cramping and some changes in your bowel habits. This is the result of a reflex action from the uterus, which often causes diarrhoea,' explains Lauren. 'Cramping is caused by the contraction of the uterine muscles in an attempt to expel the endometrial lining.' A study by London's Portland Hospital found that women are often more susceptible to injury at the end of their cycle, as the levels of the hormone relaxin rise. Outsmart your hormones by... Swapping your intensive cardio routine for a few relaxing yoga or Pilates sessions to strengthen your joints and avoid potential injuries. Add a handful of magnesium-rich epsom salts to a nice hot bath before bed to help ease away any aches and pains. This is the week to... Give up smoking. A 2008 study by the University of Minnesota found that women who gave up smoking after ovulation but before the start of their next cycle were much more likely to quit the nasty habit for good, compared with women who tried to stay smoke-free just after their period ended and before ovulation. ☑

3 of the best HORMONE-BALANCING EATS

Munch on these foods all month to help you keep your balance

1 High-fibre foods such as brown rice and oats help combat the changes in bowel habits. Fibre also helps to balance your cycle by binding to excess hormones such as oestrogen and excreting them safely from the body.



2 Oily fish rich in omega-3 such as salmon, sardines and mackerel help to minimise pesky period pain. These essential fatty acids can help to lower your level of prostaglandins, which are thought to cause that trademark ache.



3 Foods that are high in protein, such as cheese, lentils and lean meat, balance your sex hormones too, so stock up the fridge!

