

Coaching Call of training in cycle

Slide One: Opening

As I was putting this together, I realised how easy it is to disappear down the rabbit hole of hormones, symptoms, phases and trying to figure out exactly where you are in your cycle — especially when cycles are irregular or unpredictable. And honestly, that can start to feel more stressful than helpful.

So the main aim of this section isn't to obsess over hormones or perfectly "sync" everything, but simply to understand how hormonal changes can influence training, recovery, energy and appetite, so you can work with your body a little more compassionately rather than constantly fighting against it.

Also there will be pockets where I'll open the chat for some discussion because we have a nice crosssection of awesome women who are training we can hopefully give each other some tips and tricks that work too!

We will work through some basic theory of hormones and their role in a menstrual cycle, but main chunk will be running through a technique we can use no matter where we are in our hormone journey!

To start us off.....a question!

Slide Two: Question **What are the four main hormones involved in female menstrual cycle?**

What are the four hormones?

- **Oestrogen** is one of the main hormones involved in the female cycle and tends to rise in the first half of the month. Its job is to help mature and release an egg, but it also has effects all around the body. Higher oestrogen is often linked with feeling more energetic, stronger, mentally sharper and recovering better from exercise. It can also support bone health, muscle function and how the body uses carbohydrates for energy.
- **Progesterone** rises after ovulation and helps prepare the body for a possible pregnancy. It tends to have more of a calming, slowing effect on the body. Some women feel more relaxed during this phase, while others notice poorer sleep, increased hunger, more cravings or feeling hotter and more tired. As

progesterone rises, training can sometimes feel a little harder and recovery slightly slower.

- **FSH (Follicle Stimulating Hormone)** is released from the brain at the start of the cycle. Its role is to stimulate the ovaries and help follicles mature so the body can prepare an egg for ovulation. You usually don't "feel" FSH directly, but it's an important signal that helps start the menstrual cycle each month.
- **LH (Luteinising Hormone)** is another hormone released from the brain. It surges around ovulation and triggers the release of the egg from the ovary. This is why LH is often called the "ovulation trigger." Around this time, some women feel strong, energetic and confident, although others may feel bloated, emotional or notice very little at all.

Slide Three: Case Study: Typical Cycle - Charlotte

Use two examples/case studies two fictional women to illustrate how these hormones can ebb and flow through a month in direct relation to training and exercise

- Charlotte is someone who strength trains 3 times a week and generally likes to stay active.
- At the start of her cycle, during her period, both oestrogen and progesterone are low. FSH begins to rise to stimulate the ovaries ready for the next cycle. The first couple of days she feels a bit flat and tired. Her usual squat workout feels heavier than normal and she swaps a high intensity class for a long walk and mobility instead. She notices she wants more comfort foods, carbs and quick energy. She sleeps a little more and doesn't push herself too hard. But as the week goes on, her energy gradually starts returning. By the end of her period she suddenly feels much more capable in the gym again.
- As she moves into the follicular phase, oestrogen starts gradually rising and LH begins building towards ovulation. This is the phase where Charlotte often feels strongest and most motivated. She adds weight to her deadlifts, recovers well between sessions and feels more confident trying new exercises or pushing intensity. Her energy feels steadier, cravings quieter and she generally feels lighter and more resilient. Her body seems to tolerate harder sessions better here, so this might be where she enjoys heavier strength work, circuits or more challenging workouts.
- Around ovulation, oestrogen peaks and LH surges to release an egg. Some months Charlotte feels amazing here — strong, energetic, social and powerful in training. She flies through a conditioning session and feels really athletic. Other

months she barely notices ovulation at all. Occasionally she feels a bit bloated or gets a mild headache. This is important because there is huge variation between women, and even between cycles in the same woman.

- Then Charlotte moves into the luteal phase after ovulation. Progesterone rises and oestrogen fluctuates more. This is where things can suddenly feel very different. The same workout she smashed two weeks ago now feels strangely hard. She gets hotter quicker during training, needs longer rests and notices she's more sore afterwards. Sleep feels lighter, hunger increases and cravings creep up. She feels puffier and the scales may even go up slightly from water retention, despite not doing anything "wrong." Her motivation dips and she starts feeling frustrated that her fitness seems worse
- Then we go round again...

Slide Four: Cast Study Lucy

- Lucy is also someone who strength trains 3 times a week and generally likes to stay active. BUT some months she still gets a regular period, other months it's late, early or missing altogether. What she starts noticing most is that her body no longer feels predictable in the way it used to.
- In perimenopause, hormones don't simply decline smoothly — they fluctuate. Ovulation becomes less regular, progesterone is often the first hormone to become inconsistent and oestrogen can swing quite dramatically. One week Lucy may feel energised, motivated and strong in the gym, then the next she suddenly feels exhausted, inflamed and emotionally flat without really understanding why.
- Unlike Charlotte, who notices a fairly predictable pattern across her cycle, Lucy's training now feels much less consistent month to month. One month she's progressing her lifts, recovering well and feeling confident. She's sleeping better, enjoying training and feeling capable. Then a few weeks later she feels like a completely different person. Sleep becomes disrupted, she wakes up hot during the night, her joints ache more and workouts that normally feel manageable suddenly feel much harder.
- Lucy also notices her hunger and cravings are less predictable. Some weeks she feels stable and in control around food, while other weeks she feels constantly hungry and frustrated with herself. She may retain more water, feel puffier or notice bigger fluctuations on the scales despite doing very similar things.
- Then gradually, Lucy moves into post menopause. Her hormones stabilise again, but now at a lower baseline. Oestrogen is lower, progesterone is much lower and there is no longer an ovulation cycle driving those monthly fluctuations. She may

still notice waves in energy, stress tolerance and recovery, but they tend to feel less cyclical and more influenced by overall lifestyle, sleep, stress and recovery capacity.

Slide 5: What Can We All Do - Symptom Approach

Even though these two fictional women have completely different hormonal patterns, there are similarities that run through.

- Both have moments of feeling energised and strong - body is on your side
- Both have moments of feeling rubbish and low motivation - body is against us
- Both still try and battle through with 'routine' to keep progressing, some weeks feel like their getting ahead, and some don't
- Neither are lazy or doing anything wrong!

There are millions of variations on a female cycle. You might be on birth control, you might be post menopause, you might have had a hysterectomy, you might have endometriosis/PCOSs. The only pattern that matters is your own.

This isn't about trying to work out what your cycle is, rather being able to spot patterns and signals we all will experience no matter what your reality.

Tool: Symptom approach or Traffic Light System. You can do this in your journal, in your diary on your phone or even just body scan in your head ahead of your training session that day.

Slide 6: Green Light

Pretty straight forward with green light here! Green light is that feeling where you're feeling stronger, more energy, stable hunger levels...generally pretty good! Everyone has their own signs that things are going well - for me its my energy is steady all day, I don't have big surges or cravings, getting PB's.

What signals does your body give you to show its feeling resilient and has high capacity?

(Run through what they share) - If we are noticing these, jump at the chance..use the wave whilst its there. This is where your body will respond well to progressive overload, even higher intensity stuff like plyometrics or cardio if you enjoy that as your aerobic performance is enhanced in these moments, recover better so you can get away with training a bit more regularly (say 4 instead of 3 a week), you can go for your PBs. This

might last a couple of days, a week, 2 weeks....but if you feel rested, energised and pretty steady...jump at the chance!

Slide 7: Amber Light

This can be one that feels like comes up a lot in perimenopause but can be during a typical cycle and postmeno too. It can feel little 'meh', like fine, not incredible, still turning up, doing ok, lifting weights maybe one muscle really strong, but others not so great...mixed bag of sleep and energy. Might be start of the day feel good but as the day goes on you start flagging and feeling tired. Still likely that you're able to get to a decent level in workouts but need a bit more rest in between and earlier nights. Feeling quite stiff or thirsty.

Some ideas of how you can subtly adjust your training in these amber weeks - as on slide.

Its important to remember that even though your cycle might start to become really unpredictable, your capability is still there...just extra helping hands.

What helps you stay consistent when motivation is lower but you still want to move?

Slide 8 Red Light

I'm positive every single one of us has had red days. This might be really obvious by your being on your period or week beforehand, or maybe not quite as clear if you're not bleeding anymore. Low energy days still crop up and they may show up like (read out some signs). Everyones capacity is different so what will help you might vary, you might be ok to exercise on your period and find it helps but you also might have 10/10 pain that leaves you in bed. Listen to your body and over time you'll find what helps, but some ideas:

- Still come to a workout, but scale it right back, bodyweight, loads more rest, maybe shorter or less reps.
- Zone 2 - or walking, gentle movement like low energy dancing or swimming
- Use RPE (rate of perceived exertion) instead of what you can 'usually' lift
- Lean in on 'deload week' - mentally helps to see it as a well timed deload

- Time for more mobility or stretching which is so valuable. I'm awful at remembering to do this day to day, but found that I do my mobility or stretching session on my period when I would usually do a workout.

- What helps you when you're in this low capacity state? Share your tips!

Slide 9: Coaches Tips

Clodagh: I follow the same training schedule coming into my cycle, but the intensity changes, i.e., fewer sets or reps or lower weight, and I miss HIIT sometimes depending on energy. Food-wise, carbs definitely increase the week prior, and so do calories, as I'm usually ravenous. Battling A LOT of fatigue around my cycle, which is a change for me. So, having to change things slightly.

Simone: I don't intentionally do anything different but like Clodagh I eat more carbs the week before as I'm just more hungry and naturally have to lower weights as I'm weaker



Natasha: I eat a bit more and give myself some grace with upping portions and carbs, especially around training. If I'm feeling really bloated or in pain, I don't push legs as hard - particularly things like deadlifts or squats where there's a lot of core involvement. I'll switch more to machines instead, but I can pretty much always still push my upper body. Walking helps me a lot, so always keep that as a focus.

Jen: I don't do anything differently. If I'm feeling a bit weaker, I generally keep weights the same and go lower reps but that's not consistent every month, and it's more to feel than intentional. My food doesn't really change, I eat a lot of carbs in general anyway!

Dave: I think I'll leave this one to you guys...

Coaches Talk about food and I'd like to briefly add this on as a consideration to support your training because they are so closely linked.

Slide 10: Nutrition help

Green Nutrition

When oestrogen is higher and progesterone is still low, many women feel stronger, recover better and tolerate harder training well. Oestrogen is thought to suppress appetite, whilst progesterone increases. This phase often suits prioritising enough fuel overall, especially protein and quality carbohydrates to support energy, muscle recovery and performance. Many women also notice steadier appetite and fewer cravings here, so balanced meals with protein, fibre, colourful plants, healthy fats and carbs around training can work really well. You might find it easier to stay in calcs, focus on macros on these days...so just like training run with it and don't be scared of carbs!

Amber Nutrition

Around the luteal phase (the week or so before your period), or general rise in progesterone drop in oestrogen, appetite increases, metabolism can increase slightly and the body is under a bit more physiological stress. Some research suggests protein breakdown and recovery demands may increase too, which is one reason some women feel hungrier, tired or less recovered during this time. - Lean into water and smart snacks! Regular meals and top tip...don't let yourself get hungry...smooth energy throughout the day, protein first.

Red Nutrition

Blood loss during periods can also affect iron levels, especially if periods are heavy, which can contribute to fatigue, poorer recovery and lower energy. This is also why cravings often increase before a period — the body is genuinely asking for more energy, not just “being bad.” Insulin sensitivity might be lower, meaning cells are less responsive to insulin so might require higher levels to bring blood sugar levels down....big cravings for sugar and carbs!

For active women, especially those strength training, it can actually help to:

- prioritise protein consistently
- increase iron-rich foods
- not fear carbs around this time
- focus a bit more on recovery, hydration and sleep

Category	Foods	Why it helps
Iron-rich	Lean red meat, spinach, lentils, chickpeas	Replaces iron lost → reduces fatigue
Vitamin C	Oranges, berries, kiwi, peppers	Helps absorb iron better
Slow carbs	Oats, sweet potato, brown rice, wholegrain bread	Steady energy, fewer crashes
Protein	Eggs, Greek yogurt, chicken, cottage cheese	Keeps energy stable, reduces cravings
Magnesium	Dark chocolate (70%+), nuts, seeds, bananas	Helps fatigue, cramps, mood

Any favourite foods, meals or snacks in this period?

Slide 11: Sign Off

Keeping up with your routine isn't about being on or off (dial method) and hormones aren't something we can predict all the time or influence. Instead, listen to your bodies signs and adapt to what it's saying.

An anchor at the bottom of a balloon analogy.

frequently craved food among women.⁵ I can personally absolutely vouch for that, but I'm pretty consistent across my cycle when it comes to my chocolate cravings and daily consumption!

Progesterone is thought to increase appetite, whereas oestrogen may suppress it, which is why we might observe these changes during the luteal phase.⁶ Insulin sensitivity may also be lower in the luteal phase, meaning the body cells are less responsive to insulin and therefore we may require higher amounts of it to bring down blood sugar levels.⁷ This may contribute to symptoms of PMS and increase food cravings during this time.

Cravings across the menstrual cycle ^{8,9}

