FITNESS & EXERCISE

Should You Train Around Your Period?

Cycle-based training sounds precise, but the evidence supports a more personal plan built around your own symptoms and patterns.

The calendar promises too much

Your workout is planned, then cramps, fatigue or a headache arrive with your period. Cycle-based training offers an appealing answer: match every session to a menstrual phase, and stop fighting your body. The trouble is that the evidence provided here does not establish a universal phase-by-phase training plan.

A menstrual cycle is counted from the first day of one period to the first day of the next. Although about 28 days is common, shorter and longer cycles can also be normal. Bleeding itself commonly lasts three to seven days and may be light or heavy. That variation matters before you try to build a rigid training calendar around an assumed "standard" cycle.

The symptoms vary, too. Bleeding may come with cramps, lower-back pain, bloating, sore breasts, headaches or fatigue. Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) can also bring physical and emotional changes before bleeding starts. A neat plan that treats every cycle-and every person-the same overlooks the information most relevant to your workout: how you actually feel that day.

Your symptoms are better data

PMS commonly begins before a period and eases after bleeding starts, but its timing and impact are not identical for everyone. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and may change throughout your life. Researchers do not know its exact cause, although changing hormone levels during the cycle may play a role.

That does not mean movement is irrelevant. Regular exercise is included among the ways people may manage non-severe PMS. But this general advice is not proof that one type of workout belongs in one menstrual phase, or that you must lower or raise training intensity on particular cycle days. The supplied research does not answer those questions.

A more defensible approach is to let recurring symptoms inform decisions without turning them into rules. If cramps or fatigue repeatedly make a particular session feel unmanageable, changing that session is a response to your experience-not evidence that everyone should

train differently during menstruation. Equally, if you feel able to complete your usual activity, these sources provide no reason to alter it solely because bleeding has started.

Pain changes the question

Period-related lower-back pain should not be confused with chronic low-back pain, but research on the latter shows why broad exercise claims require care. A 2022 network meta-analysis of 118 trials found that most forms of exercise improved chronic low-back pain and disability. Pilates, mind-body and core-based exercise performed well for pain, while Pilates, strength and core-based exercise performed well for disability.

Another network meta-analysis reached broadly similar conclusions, finding low-quality evidence in favour of Pilates, resistance, stabilisation or motor-control exercise, and aerobic exercise for different chronic low-back-pain outcomes. The researchers also highlighted substantial variation among studies and a shortage of studies with a low risk of bias. Neither review tested ordinary menstrual cramps.

Endometriosis makes the uncertainty even clearer. A 2021 systematic review found only three usable intervention studies, involving 109 people. The activities included flexibility and strength work, cardiovascular fitness and yoga, but only one study reported improved pain intensity. The reviewers concluded that the effect of physical activity on endometriosis-associated symptoms could not be determined. Exercise should not be sold as a settled remedy where the research remains this limited.

Comfort belongs in the plan

Training during a period also involves ordinary practicalities. Pads, tampons, menstrual cups, discs and period underwear can all be used to manage bleeding. The useful choice is the one you can use according to its instructions, change or clean appropriately, and remain comfortable wearing during your activity.

Good menstrual hygiene includes washing your hands before and after changing a menstrual product and changing products regularly. Pads should be changed every few hours and more frequently with heavy flow. Tampons should be changed every four to eight hours and should not remain in place for longer than eight hours. Cups should be cleaned daily after use, while reusable period underwear should be washed according to its directions.

Breathable clothing can help with comfort because tight fabric may trap heat and moisture. Scented pads, tampons and toilet paper can irritate skin and affect the vagina's natural pH

balance. None of this makes a workout more effective. It simply removes avoidable discomfort from a day when cramps, bloating or bleeding may already be competing for your attention.

Track before you reorganise

Before changing your training around an idealised cycle, record what happens in your own one. Period tracking can help you understand your usual pattern, anticipate bleeding and notice changes. Add the details that affect activity: whether you had cramps, fatigue, headaches, lower-back pain or an unusually heavy flow, and whether those symptoms disrupted what you intended to do.

Tracking also shows where self-adjustment stops being enough. Talk with a health professional if you develop major cycle changes, very heavy bleeding or severe pain. Extreme or unusual pain, a heavier or longer period than usual, or symptoms that interfere with daily life also deserve medical attention. Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), a severe and less common form of PMS, can interfere substantially with life.

On Monday, start one cycle record using a paper calendar and a pen, or a phone calendar if you prefer. Mark the first day of bleeding and note only the symptoms that changed your activity. Do not rebuild your whole routine yet. A calendar, a pen and a few honest observations will tell you more about your next training decision than a generic cycle chart can.

Where this comes from

- Menstruation

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/menstruation.html
- Premenstrual Syndrome

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/premenstrualsyndrome.html
- Healthy Habits: Menstrual Hygiene

  Centers for Disease Control and Prevention · https://www.cdc.gov/hygiene/about/menstrual-hygiene.html
- Physical exercise in pregnancy: benefits, risks and prescription.

  Journal of perinatal medicine, 2022 · https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34478617/
- Best Exercise Options for Reducing Pain and Disability in Adults With Chronic Low Back Pain: Pilates, Strength, Core-Based, and Mind-Body. A Network Meta-analysis.

  The Journal of orthopaedic and sports physical therapy, 2022 · https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35722759/



- Exercise as medicine for depressive symptoms? A systematic review and meta-analysis with meta-regression.

  British journal of sports medicine, 2023 · https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36731907/
- Which specific modes of exercise training are most effective for treating low back pain? Network meta-analysis.

  British journal of sports medicine, 2020 · https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31666220/
- Effect of physical activity and exercise on endometriosis-associated symptoms: a systematic review.

  BMC women's health, 2021 · https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34627209/