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Cycle-Synced Training Plan

4-Week Phase-Aligned Movement Guide



EVIDENCE-INFORMED | RPE GUIDED | ADAPTABLE

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The Science of Cycle-Synced Training

The question of whether the menstrual cycle affects exercise performance has been studied extensively but with mixed results. Here is what the best evidence actually says — honestly.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SUPPORTS CLEARLY

McNulty et al. 2020 (Sports Medicine 50:1813) found exercise performance tends to be lowest in the early follicular (menstrual) phase and highest in late follicular / ovulatory phases. However, average effect sizes were small and individual variation was large.

WHAT THE EVIDENCE DOES NOT CLEARLY SUPPORT

Colenso-Semple et al. 2023 (Frontiers in Sports) found no compelling evidence that cycle phase significantly affects acute strength performance or resistance training adaptations in most women. The follicular advantage is real but modest and unreliable at the individual level.

WHAT THE METABOLIC EVIDENCE SUPPORTS (MORE ROBUSTLY)

Multiple studies (Zderic 2001; Hackney 2022) consistently show the follicular phase favours carbohydrate oxidation during exercise; luteal phase shifts toward fat oxidation and higher resting metabolism. These differences matter for fueling and recovery.

THE HOLISTIC CASE FOR CYCLE-ALIGNED TRAINING

Even where RCT performance data is mixed, aligning training load with subjective energy, recovery, and pain is compassionate and supported by self-report data. Many women find it reduces injury risk, improves consistency, and reduces burnout.

This plan is a framework, not a prescription. Your subjective experience today is more reliable than any phase-based guideline. If you feel strong on Day 3 of your period, train. If you feel exhausted on Day 14, rest. The phases tell you what is probable; your body tells you what is true.

Training Intensity Reference

This plan uses RPE (Rate of Perceived Exertion) instead of fixed percentages. RPE respects daily variation and is more practical for cycle-synced training.

LEVEL	RPE	% 1RM	DESCRIPTION	PHASE FIT
Very light	2-3	<50%	Easy conversation, near-effortless	Menstrual, late luteal
Light	4	50-60%	Comfortable, could keep going for hours	Menstrual, early follicular
Moderate	5-6	60-70%	Some effort, can still speak in sentences	Early follicular, early luteal
Somewhat hard	7	70-80%	Noticeable effort, short sentences only	Late follicular, ovulatory
Hard	8	80-90%	Difficult, only short phrases	Late follicular, ovulatory
Very hard	9	90-95%	Maximum sustainable, single words	Peak only, ovulatory
Maximum	10	95-100%	All-out effort, cannot maintain	Rare — only when feeling amazing

Week 1

Menstrual — "Rest"

Move gently. Prioritize sleep. Emphasize walking, mobility, and restorative work. Nothing that raises heart rate above light-moderate.

DAY	PRIMARY WORKOUT	INTENSITY	NOTES
Day 1	30–45 min gentle walk outdoors	RPE 2–3	Mobility work: 10 min
Day 2	Rest OR 20 min yin yoga	Body-weight only if an	Focus on breath
Day 3	30 min walk + 10 min stretching	RPE 3	Slow, steady
Day 4	Optional light strength (if feeling energy)	RPE 4–5, higher reps I	30 min max
Day 5	Restorative yoga OR walk	RPE 2–3	Nervous system recovery
Day 6	Light strength: full body	RPE 5, 3 sets of 12	Focus on quality of movement
Day 7	Rest or nature walk	RPE 2–3	Reset and prepare

Week 2

Follicular — "Refresh & Grow"

Rebuild capacity. Early week: rebuild from rest. Later week: capacity for harder work returns. This is when most PRs happen for cycling women.

DAY	PRIMARY WORKOUT	INTENSITY	NOTES
Day 8	Full-body strength	RPE 6, 4 sets of 8–10	45 min
Day 9	Zone 2 cardio 30 min	RPE 5–6	Can talk in sentences
Day 10	Strength: upper body focus	RPE 7, 4 sets of 6–8	Building intensity
Day 11	HIIT: 6x30s hard/90s easy	RPE 8–9 on efforts	Sprint intervals
Day 12	Strength: lower body focus	RPE 7–8, work up to he	Squats, deadlifts, lunges
Day 13	Active recovery: yoga OR long walk	RPE 3–4	45–60 min
Day 14	Full-body strength OR sport	RPE 7–8	Peak preparation

Week 3

Ovulatory into Early Luteal — "Connect → Nurture"

Peak output early week (ovulation window). Then gradually reduce intensity as progesterone rises. Body temperature elevated in luteal — hydrate more.

DAY	PRIMARY WORKOUT	INTENSITY	NOTES
Day 15	Peak strength OR PR attempt	RPE 8–9, 3–5 reps at h	Warmup thoroughly
Day 16	Sport OR group fitness OR outdoor adventure	RPE 7–8	Something social
Day 17	Full body strength	RPE 6–7, 4 sets of 8	Slight backing off
Day 18	Zone 2 cardio 40 min	RPE 5	Aerobic base
Day 19	Pilates OR barre	RPE 5–6	Control and stability
Day 20	Full body strength (moderate)	RPE 6, 3 sets of 10	Feel-good session
Day 21	Long walk or hike	RPE 4	60+ min if possible

Week 4

Late Luteal — "Restore"

Honor the drop. Reduce intensity. Movement should feel like medicine, not punishment. Walking is undervalued this week.

DAY	PRIMARY WORKOUT	INTENSITY	NOTES
Day 22	Zone 2 walk or bike 30 min	RPE 4	<i>Nothing hard</i>
Day 23	Yin yoga OR mobility	RPE 2–3	<i>30 min</i>
Day 24	Light strength: full body	RPE 5, high reps low w	<i>3 sets of 15</i>
Day 25	Walk in nature	RPE 3	<i>Fresh air, sunlight</i>
Day 26	Restorative yoga	RPE 2	<i>30–45 min</i>
Day 27	Very gentle walk	RPE 2–3	<i>Or rest</i>
Day 28	Full rest	—	<i>Prepare to begin cycle again</i>

Fueling Your Training

Training is a stressor. How you fuel around it determines whether you adapt or break down. Cycle phase changes what your body needs.

MENSTRUAL & EARLY FOLLICULAR

Iron-rich meals if flow was heavy. Warm cooked foods (they are easier to digest). Adequate protein for tissue repair. Do not restrict during this window — the body is rebuilding.

LATE FOLLICULAR & OVULATORY

Higher carbohydrate needs to fuel harder training. Complex carbs before workouts (oats, sweet potato, rice). Adequate protein at every meal (0.7-1g per lb of goal body weight).

EARLY LUTEAL

Progesterone raises basal metabolic rate by 100-300 calories/day. You may naturally want more food. This is normal. Focus on protein and complex carbs.

LATE LUTEAL

Steady blood sugar is protective for mood. Complex carbs at every meal. Reduce alcohol (it disrupts progesterone metabolism). Magnesium-rich foods help.