

Welcome to episode 3 of The Future is Cyclic!

This is a crash course in menstrual cycle awareness. For anyone who is new to these ideas,

Over the lifetime of this podcast, we are going to look at many different frameworks for understanding our cycles. I think of these as different lenses that we can use for looking at our cycles. Each one gives us different entry points for understanding, relating to, and embodying the natural energies that our cycles entail.

Today I'm really going to focus on a brief explanation of what's going on physiologically throughout the cycle. We're not going to get too involved here but just enough that we have a clear understanding what's going on in our bodies and why throughout the menstrual cycle. And if you'd like to dive deeper into this, I really recommend the books *Taking Charge of Your Fertility* by Toni Weschler and *The Fifth Vital Sign* by Lisa Hendrickson-Jack.

And then I'm going to introduce you to the four seasons framework of Menstrual Cycle Awareness. This framework was created by Red School founder, Alexandra Pope, and gives us a really accessible entry point into understanding the energies of the menstrual cycle's four phases by relating them to something we've all experienced many, many times...the seasons of the Earth.

And even if you are very familiar with Menstrual Cycle Awareness, I hope I can offer some new insights and ways of relating to your cycle, that can further deepen that relationship for you.

So, let's dive in...

I always like to point out that while it's understandable that our period gets a lot of attention in this work, from our body's perspective, it really isn't the star of the show.

Why is that? Because for our bodies, the cycle is aimed at procreation. And so the ultimate goal of the cycle is OVULATION...the release of an egg from one of the ovaries.

Our cycles are a vital sign...just like your heart rate, temperature, etc. And regular ovulation is a very good indicator of a healthy cycle. We'll talk a bit more about this and how you can start keeping track of when you're ovulating, as well as why you'd want to, in a future episode.

I'll post a graphic in the show notes that depicts the basic hormonal fluctuations that take place over the course of an average cycle in the show notes for those of us who make sense of these things better visually.

While our bodies go through an intricate dance each menstrual cycle involving a complex web of hormones, I'll focus on three of the better known ones today: oestrogen, progesterone, and testosterone, to give us a big picture overview of what we experience each cycle.

If we start in the pre-ovulatory phase...oestrogen has been slowly rising throughout the first days of our period and continues to do so throughout this phase as our body prepares the ovaries to release an egg. Our energy and libido is rising during this phase, and we start being more focused on other people and the outer world again.

Oestrogen peaks just before ovulation and then slowly starts to drop off.

When we ovulate, when that egg is released, we experience a bump in testosterone that can make us feel really productive, social, maybe horny.

Both oestrogen and testosterone drop off steeply following ovulation. If conception didn't occur, the egg will break down. Energy can fall quite drastically here and for many people it can be an emotionally sticky place in the cycle.

And from this point forward, progesterone really takes center stage in this hormonal dance.

So if oestrogen was our go out and party hormone, progesterone is really the "Netflix under the duvet" hormone. It can make us feel calm and centred but it also really encourages us to avoid risk, to stay cozy...all because our body is trying to protect a potential pregnancy.

This second half of the cycle is much more reflective and inwardly focused.

Approximately a week before our period arrives, we'll have another small bump in oestrogen ...I often refer to this as the "premenstrual nesting phase" as it closely mimics the energy we often experience in the third trimester of pregnancy. There's an urge to finish projects and tick things off our to-do lists and if we use that energy mindfully and intentionally without overdoing it, this can be a helpful way to clear the decks and have more space to rest during menstruation.

All three of these hormones reach their lowest points right before we bleed and then we'll start the whole cycle over again.

So that's a broad overview of what's happening from a physiological perspective but ultimately, our cycle is always impacting every area of how we experience the world. And the Inner Seasons framework acts as a beautiful metaphor for understanding the different energies that we move through in each phase of the cycle.

The pre-ovulatory phase is the inner spring. There's a feeling of freshness in the air. Life can feel new and hopeful. Many people have a real propensity for big picture thinking and planning in this phase. It's a wonderful time to plant our intentions, just like we'd plant seeds in spring. Often a sense of hopefulness and optimism permeates this phase. Our energy rises. We might feel playful and curious. We're more able to think and focus than when we were bleeding. It's a time of new beginnings.

But just like seeds are just beginning to germinate under the ground at this time of year, there's a vulnerability that comes with the pre-ovulatory phase. We might feel a little bit tender, vulnerable, or uncertain. I always advise people to pace themselves here...not to go too fast too soon and risk burning themselves out. Remember that you have plenty of time to water those seeds and bring your intentions to life.

And then we move into ovulation...the inner summer. This phase is characterised by fullness and blooming. Our productivity is at its peak here. Generosity and nurturing often come naturally and can feel really good. Libido often increases in this phase and we can have easier access to pleasure. Feelings of joy, abundance, and connection are typical in the inner summer. We are best able to build muscle in this phase and we're more verbally articulate. There's also a real ability in this phase to make the world more beautiful, just like the blooming of our beautiful summer garden.

For some people this phase can feel a bit too much, especially if they have been burning themselves out the rest of the cycle. There can be a frustration or lack of direction if you didn't plant those intentions in spring and you're not sure where to best pour your energy. And certainly like I mentioned, there's a big hormonal drop off directly following ovulation that can often feel sticky...I liken this too late summer when the heat and all of the activity start to feel too much, and we're a bit exhausted by it all.

And then we move into the premenstruum, the inner autumn. Do you know what I mean by the real sensuality of autumn? That feeling of aliveness, sensuality, and

being connected deeply to nature that can come as the temperature gets crisp and the leaves start to change...that's the energy of this phase. We're very clearly able to see what's not working here and use that discernment to edit our lives, just as we prune away the old parts of our garden. And as I mentioned, there's a nesting energy that helps us get things done and if directed in this way, clear the decks so we are more free to rest when bleeding...which is very similar to the preparations we might make to ready our lives for energy. And of course autumn is also the harvest season. Hopefully we've been nurturing those intentions throughout the cycle, and here's where we can celebrate the fruits we're beginning to see, however small. I always recommend taking some time here to really acknowledge yourself and your efforts in this phase.

This phase of the cycle asks us to begin slowing down and turning inwards, which can be really difficult. This tension can lead to all sorts of premenstrual difficulties until we begin working with these energies a little more consciously.

And of course that naturally leads us into menstruation, the inner winter of the cycle. This is a time of quiet, stillness, rest, regeneration. Often this is accompanied by feelings of relief and release of the tension that may have been building during your inner autumn. We have an increased access to intuition and what direction to take with projects, tasks, goals, etc. And we have a deep connection with ourselves in this phase. We're invited to let go and start anew.

But of course, that is not easy in our culture and perhaps especially as parents, so many people end up experiencing a lot of discomfort and exhaustion in this phase. Often it just takes really small tweaks to shift this experience and move into the bliss and regenerative capacity that our inner winter offers.

If you're curious to dive deeper into the Inner Seasons Framework, I always recommend the book *Wild Power* by Alexandra Pope and Shanie Hugo Wurlitzer. Or you can download my free ebook, *Cyclic Parenting 101*, from my website SarahStarrs.com

If these concepts are new to you, often just having them in mind can be transformative. Giving ourselves space to consciously inhabit these energies rather than resist them can go a long way to reducing tension throughout the cycle.

If you're ready to work with your cycle consciously and change your relationship with it, I work with clients 1:1 to build cyclic lives based on ease, flow, and

connection. You can find out more at sarahstarrs.com/coaching or send me an email: hello@sarahstarrs.com. I'd love to chat with you!re