



LIVING WITH THE FEMALE CYCLE

Challenges and opportunities

About the team and me

- Physiotherapist (B.Sc.)
- Dance teacher (BA) (currently studying in Finland)
- The university women's representatives



© Sarah Andersen

Image 1: Cartoon Sarah Andersen

Our communication about our cycle



How well informed do you feel about the female cycle?

Not at all

I read/learned something about it

Theoretically I know something, but I can't apply it to myself

Very good

How well do you know your own cycle?

Not at all

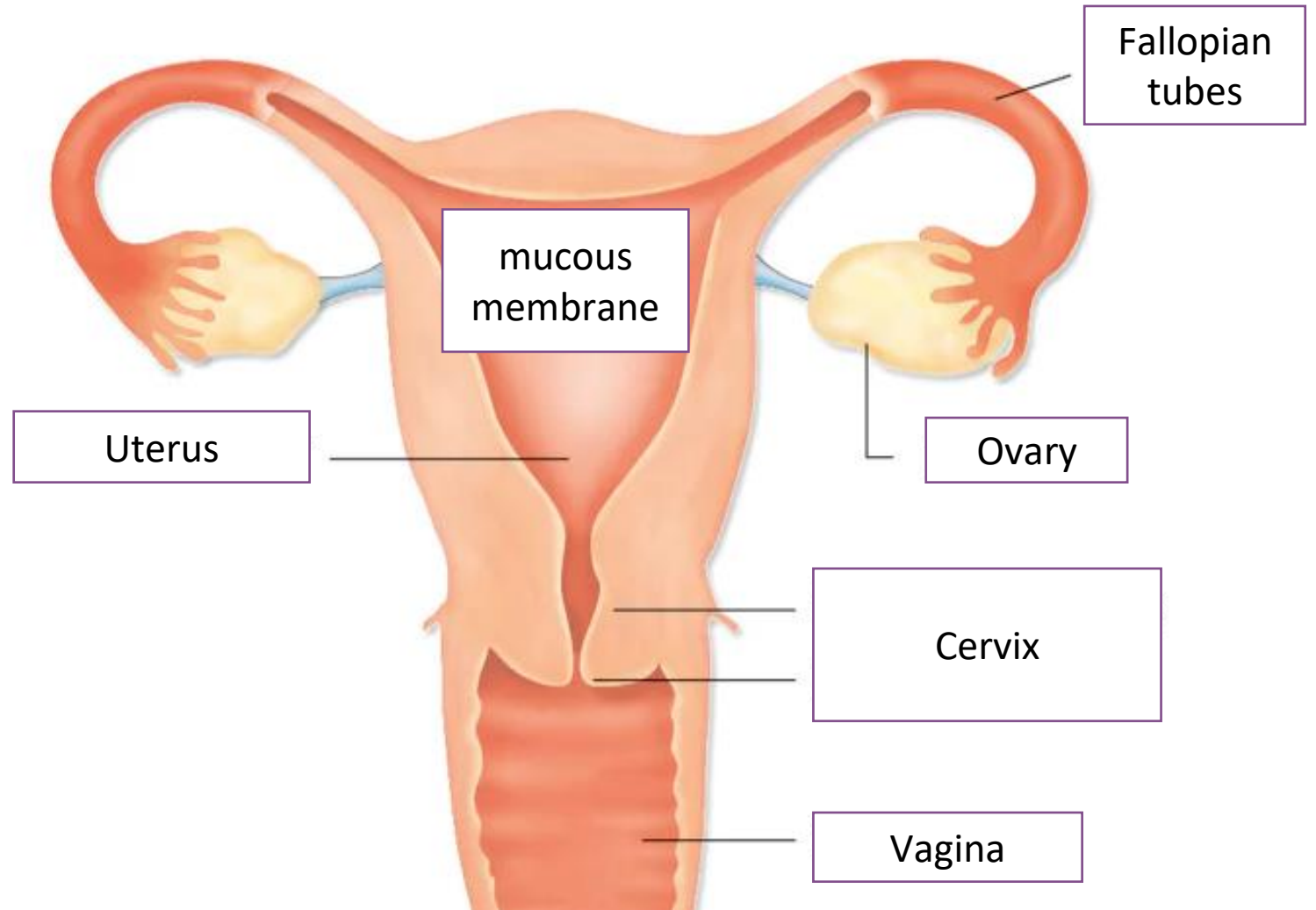
Well, either I
have my period
or not

All mood swings
are definitely
hormonal

Very good

Female anatomy

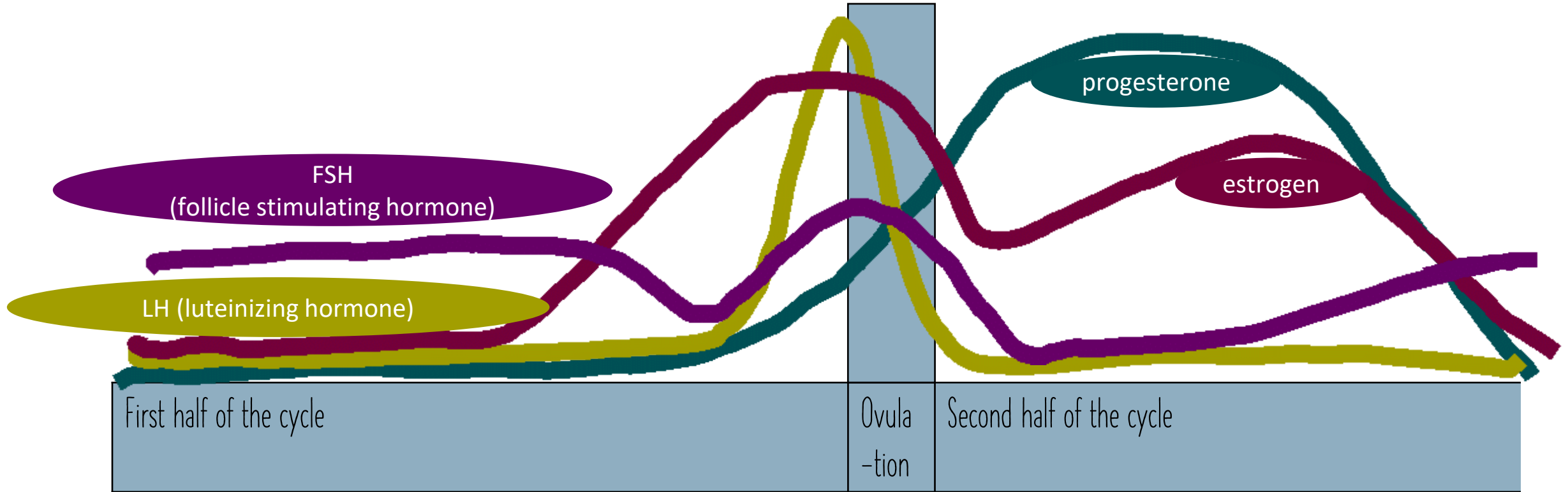
- Implantation of a fertilized egg into the mucous membrane
- Fallopian tube = place of fertilization of the egg
- Egg cells in the ovary = follicles (before ovulation)



The internal female sexual organs in longitudinal section
© W&B/Dr. Ulrike Möhle

Image 2: female sexual organs

Hormonal cycle



The cycle

CYCLE PHASES

 **Menstrual phase**

 **Follicular phase**

 **Ovulation phase**

 **Luteal phase**

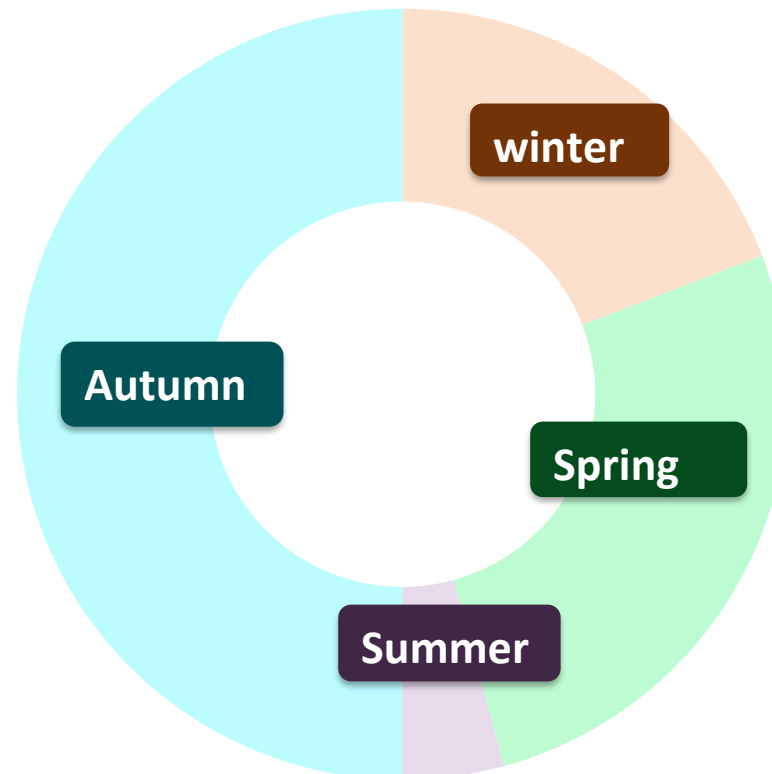
CYCLE - SEASONS

 menstrual phase

 follicular phase

 ovulation phase

 luteal phase



- **Not clearly defined, blurry transitions!**
- **Cycles are everywhere in nature**
- In the past (without artificial light) the cycle may have been influenced by moon phases:
 - Full moon = ovulation
 - New moon = menstruation

The seasons of the cycle

Winter

Withdrawal and reflection
Silence and relaxation
Self love
Inner attention, awareness
Visions

Spring

Motivation and energy
Creativity & diversity of ideas
self-consciousness
Focusing
Willingness to show yourself to the
outside world

Summer

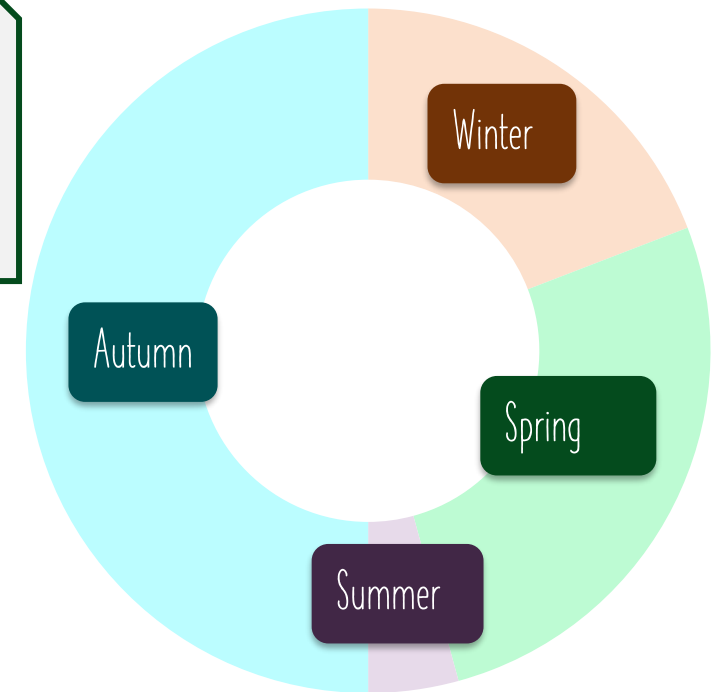
Willingness to take risks
Contentment & relaxation
Creativity peak
Life extroverted
Receptive to affection

Autumn

Self-determination
Liberation, letting go
Empathy
Increased appetite
Calm and sleepiness
Problem detection

CYCLE - SEASONS

- menstrual phase
- follicular phase
- ovulation phase
- luteal phase



Use of the seasons



Regeneration, healing, reflection, journaling, walking, yoga,...



Social contacts, fun, sport,...



Salary discussions, Negotiations, job interviews, giving lectures, problem-oriented work, sport, sex, fun,...



Sleep, giving up habits, tidying up and clearing things out, finishing projects, creative activities (singing, dancing, painting), meditation, becoming aware of your own problems (physical and mental),...

What happens in the phases?

Here laid out on a 28 day cycle

Menstrual phase (day 1-6)

- The top layer of the uterine lining sheds / dissolves.
- The period begins.

Follicular phase (day 6-13)

- **Estrogen** production
- Egg cells mature
- **Progesterone** is produced
- Mucous membrane / lining in the uterus is built up

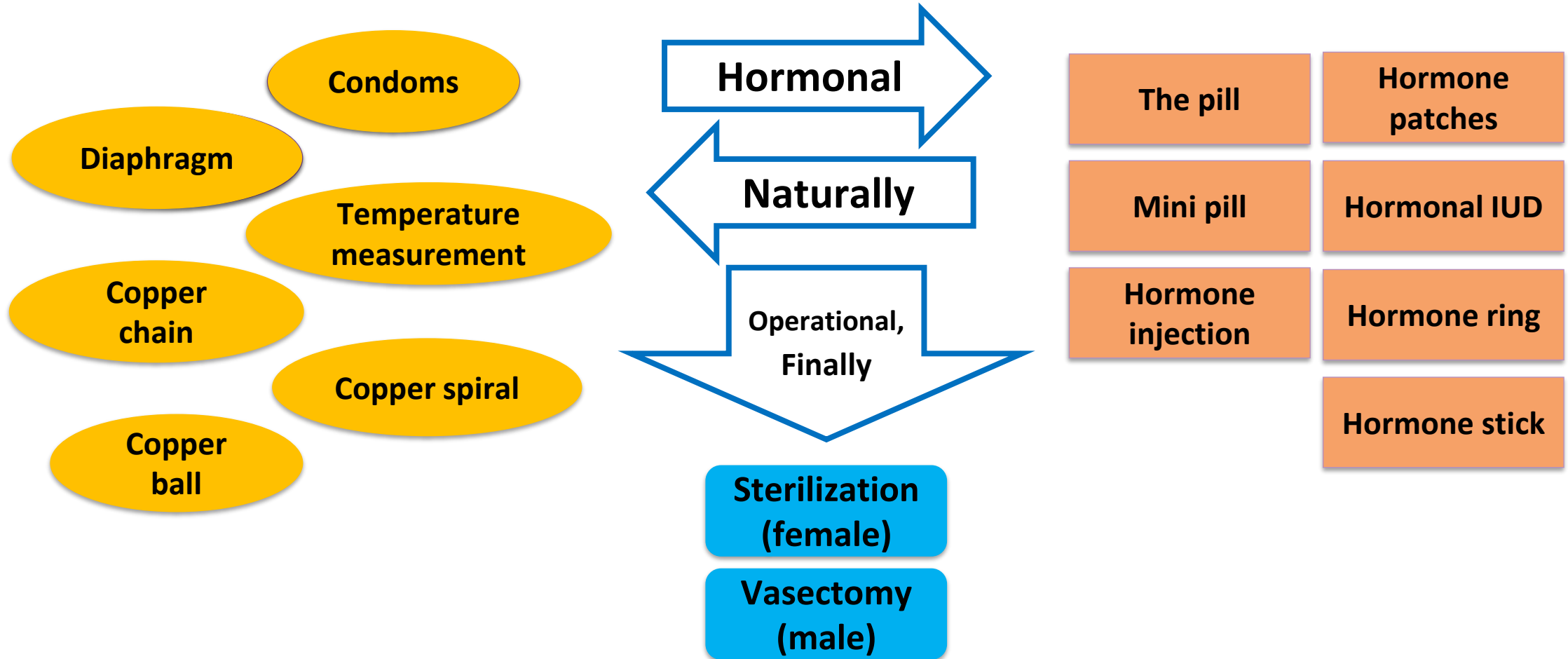
Ovulation phase (approx. 14th day) → 12-14 before

- Ovulation (due to the **luteinizing hormone** triggered)
- Path of the egg into the uterus
- More fluid cervical mucus (permeability for sperm)

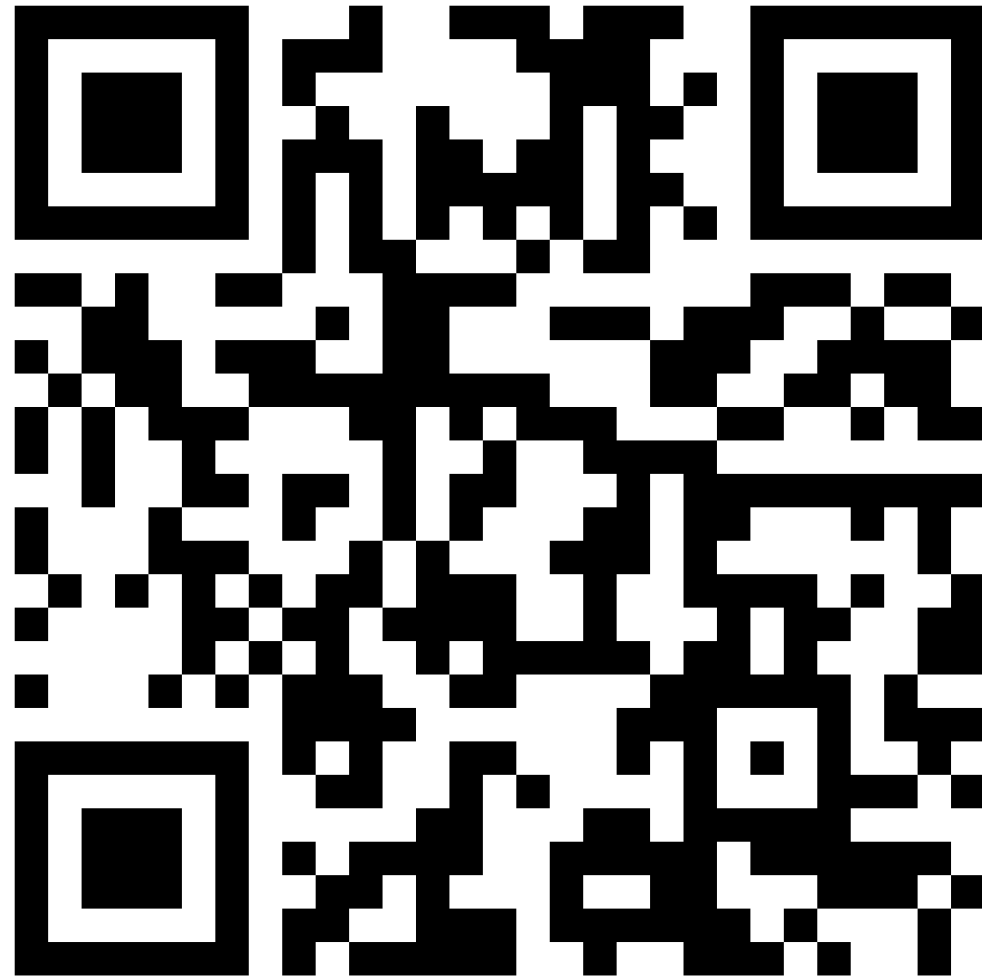
Luteal phase (day 15-28)

- Production of **progesterone** by the corpus luteum
- Uterine lining reaches maximum
- Without fertilization: signal to shed the uterine lining

How do you use contraception?

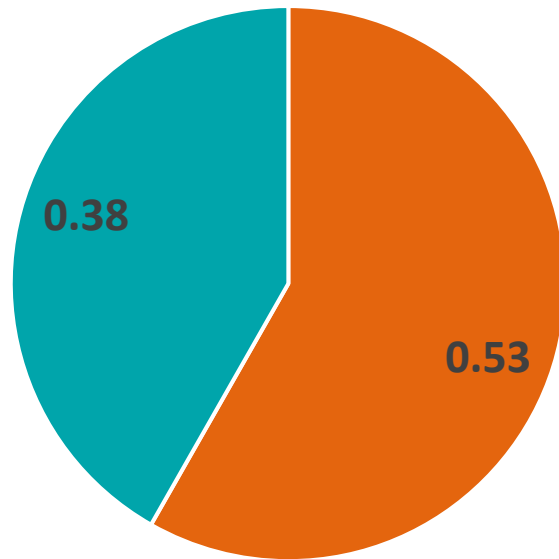


How do you use contraception ?



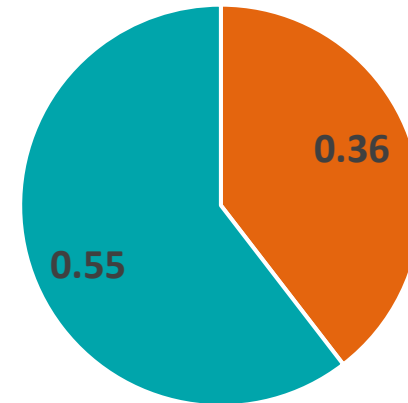
Condom replaces pill as number one contraceptive

2023



Condoms Pill

2007

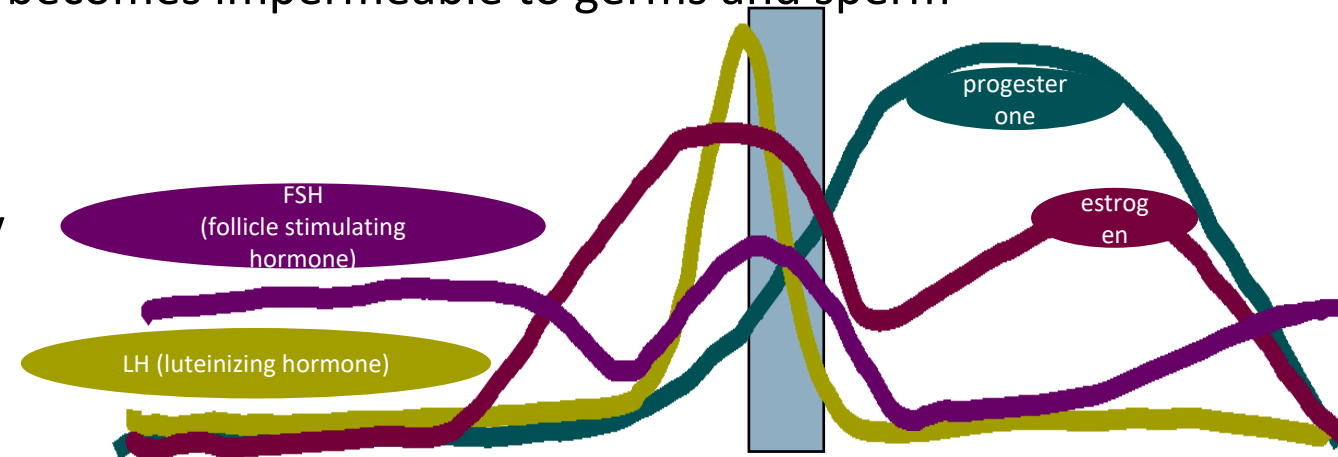


Condoms Pill

What happens with hormonal contraception?

Depending on the composition of the pill preparations, different mechanisms are caused:

- **Gestagen** (synthesized progesterone) is administered
 - cervical mucus is thickened and the cervix becomes impermeable to germs and sperm
 - ovulation is prevented
- **Estrogen** is supplied
 - maturation of a new egg becomes unlikely



Apparent “cycle” because stopping the pill causes a so called withdrawal bleeding

What is bleeding when taking the pill / hormonal contraception?

- Hormone intake
 - Inhibits hormone production, ovulation and egg maturation are hindered & but the mucous membrane is still built up (the body is permanently in the second half of the cycle and does *not* go through a real cycle)
- Taking a break from hormone intake = lowers the hormone level
 - signal for mucous membrane shutting / dissolving

**Bleeding
begins**

**Reason: Hormone levels drop
(no ovulation or unfertilized egg)**

**Hormone
withdrawal
bleeding /
withdrawal
bleeding**

Stopping hormonal contraception?

Side effects, especially with on-off contraception, can be dangerous

Always in consultation with a doctor

- Pregnancy is usually possible straight away – consider other forms of contraception
- Hormones from the pill can remain for up to 6 weeks
 - If you want to become pregnant, wait for the first full cycle and the first regular bleeding
(possible complications during pregnancy due to insufficient mucous membrane development)
 - This may vary with other hormonal contraceptives (e.g. hormone injections)
 - Cycle Awareness: Ovulation occurs 14 days before menstruation

Side effects are normal in the first period:
headaches, cramps, intermenstrual bleeding, hair loss, low mood, irritability, impure skin

Comparison of hormonal & non-hormonal contraceptives

Benefits of hormonal contraception

- Safest contraceptives (if taken correctly)
- Intake errors are lower depending on the medication
- Regulated cycle
- Fewer menstrual disorders
- Reduced risk of cancer in the endometrium and ovaries
- Lower risk of fallopian tube infections
- Pain reduction
- Improved skin appearance
- Effect against PMS

Benefits of natural contraception

- Fewer to no side effects
- No hormonal weight fluctuations
- Knowledge about your own body and its cyclical symptoms
- No influence on later desire to have children
- Real cycle present
- fertility
- Condoms protect against sexually transmitted diseases

Why is weighing up the benefits important to us?

→ Our quality of life depends on it!

Signs & Symptoms During a Cycle

MENSTRUAL PHASE	FOLLICULAR PHASE	OVULATION PHASE	LUTEAL PHASE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pain in the abdomen due to the contraction of the uterus ➤ Radiation of pain to the back ➤ Dizziness ➤ Nausea ➤ Headaches, migraine-like symptoms ➤ Nausea, nausea, diarrhea ➤ Feeling of tension in the breasts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Little research in this area ➤ Few complaints ➤ Feeling of well-being very common 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Short stabbing/pulling pain in the abdomen ➤ Soft cervix ➤ Increased basal temperature (up to 0.6°C) ➤ Spinnability of cervical mucus ➤ Possibly short bleeding ➤ Feeling of tension in the breasts ➤ Increased libido 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ PMS symptoms: ➤ Feelings of tension in the breasts and abdomen ➤ Headache, back, joint or muscle pain ➤ Water retention ➤ Sleep or digestive problems ➤ Skin impurity ➤ Cravings for food ➤ Tendency to edema

Symptoms can vary a lot from person to person and transitions can become blurred!

PMS - Premenstrual Syndrome

Physical Symptoms

Abdominal pain
Headache
Tight and painful breasts
Impure skin
Cravings
Weight gain through
water retention
Digestive problems
Dizziness/circulatory problems
Back pain

Psychic Symptoms

Irritability
Difficulties to
concentrate
Low self-esteem
Aggressions
Anxiety
Crying fits
Depression

Signs & Symptoms During a Cycle

WHY ARE SIGNS SO IMPORTANT FOR US?

Mindfulness

What do these hormones mean for us?

Signs that show what we are able
to achieve

Signs that tell us to take time for
ourselves.

Fertility

→ Ability to reproduce

What can I do on my own?



Sleep



Sports



Nutrition



**Working
environment
New
opportunities,
communi-
cation**



Self-planning



Other

INDIVIDUAL

SLEEP

Sleeping disorders caused by the drop in progesterone (sleep-promoting).



Fixed times for
falling asleep and
waking up, eating
and doing
activities



Relaxation
exercises and
rituals



Activating sport
(at least 4 hours
before going to
bed)



Evening walk,
progressive
muscle
relaxation, yoga,
breathing
exercises

SPORTS

- **Estrogen** - anabolic (building) effect shortly before ovulation: protection of the blood vessels, reduction of bone loss, activation of the parasympathetic nervous system (relaxation throughout the body), storage of water and fat
 - **Progesterone** – catabolic (degrading) effect 2nd half of the cycle: activation of the sympathetic nervous system (tension throughout the body is increased), increase in body temperature
- The interaction between the two hormones varies from individual to individual.

 Cardiovascular activity can have a positive effect on mood, endorphins, anxiety, depression and menstrual pain

SPORTS

Natural cycle

- First half of the cycle:** maximum strength training is better
- Mid-cycle (ovulation):** greater stretchability and elasticity of the ligaments and tendons (increased risk of injury due to instability and exhaustion)
- Second half of the cycle:** possibly poorer adaptation to the environment, reduced maximum endurance performance, recommendation of stabilization of new training stimuli and more recovery

Hormonal contraception (pill)

→ might result in slightly inferior exercise performance on average when compared to naturally menstruating women



Individually very different – requires individual measurement

NUTRITION - General



Nutrition during menstruation

- **Healthy fats** (unsaturated fatty acids) → walnuts, fish, avocado, olive oil, flax seeds,...
- **Vitamin A** supports hormone processing in the liver → carrots, spinach, kale, pumpkin, sweet potatoes,...
- Avoiding flatulence → steam/boil vegetables, avoid salt
- **Magnesium** helps against cramps and migraines → Nuts, legumes, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, whole grain foods
- **Iron** (e.g. in case of iron deficiency due to heavy bleeding) → meat, pulses, seeds, kernels,...
- **Vitamin C** improves iron absorption; coffee and black/green tea can inhibit absorption

Following this diet a week before your period starts is said to be beneficial.

Nutrition during the follicular phase and ovulation

- **Probiotic foods** for improved processing of hormones in the first half of the cycle
→ sprouts and fermented foods, sauerkraut, soy sprouts, kimchi, broccoli sprouts

FROM OVULATION

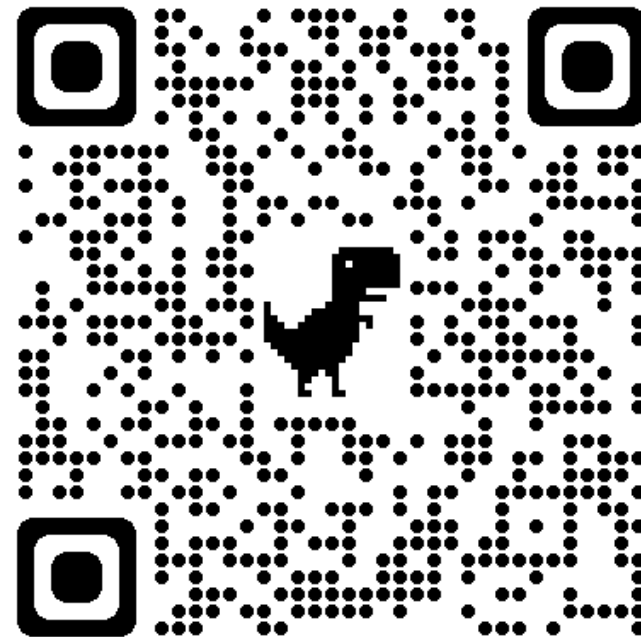
- **High-fiber** Diet rich in antioxidants and calcium → colorful fruits and vegetables, broccoli, kale, rocket, fennel, poppy seeds, sesame, spices and herbs (highest concentration of antioxidants)
- Avoid red meat and dairy products

Nutrition during the luteal phase

- **vitamin B** supports the production of serotonin and dopamine and a more positive mood
→ oatmeal, rye bread, quinoa, legumes, bananas, green leafy vegetables
- **Omega-3** protects against depression and ensures a good mood → lentils, linseed, whole grain pasta, green vegetables
- Avoiding acidic foods → more **alkaline diet** (fruit and vegetables, nuts, sprouts, seeds)
- **Saffron and calcium** against PMS symptoms → pumpkin, sesame seeds, almonds, hazelnuts
- **Vitamin A** for hormonal acne → carrots, spinach, kale, pumpkin, sweet potatoes
- **Monk pepper** → Inhibits prolactin release when taken in higher doses
→ Ready-made preparations are already dosed correctly

Nutrition

Further information on this website



<https://www.eatbetter.de/cycle-ernaehrung-das-ist-den-4-phasen-important>

Nutrition - diet

Have you ever thought about a diet or gone on a diet?

Does your weight play major role?

Did you know that weight also changes over the course of the female cycle?

Weight fluctuations are normal over the course of the female cycle

→ Hormone fluctuations influence:

- Appetite
- Water retention
- Physical activity

Weight measurement once a month around the same time period might make sense to get reliable numbers.

ENVIRONMENT AND WORK

Spain: 3 (up to 5) sick days per month for menstrual cramps

POSSIBILITIES

Flexible working hours

Open communication

Rest areas (workplace design)

Hygiene products, office hot water bottles, tea, chocolate

Cycle tracking

Corporate health management → yoga courses, health days, workshops

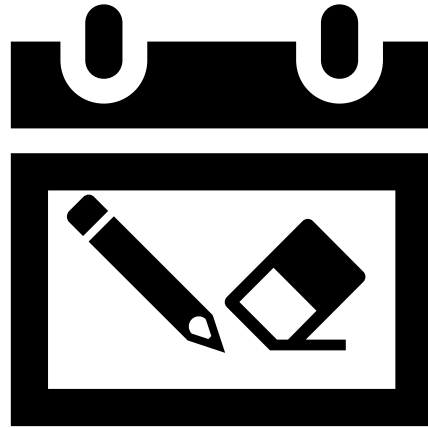
Shift planning taking cycles into account

Facts:

- 80% of women go to work but are not productive → presenteeism
- The topic is taboo: only 1/5th of women speak openly about the reason for their absence
- Night shift has negative effects on menstruation (risk of endometriosis, irregularities)
- Woman spends more than 2500€ in her life on hygiene products

Inclusion → recognizing and respecting

OWN PLANNING



**Learn to listen to your own body
→ flexibly adapt your daily schedule to your
own needs**

AND MORE...

FEMALE MASTURBATION (taboo topics of sexuality)



BENEFITS

better genital
self-image

higher emotional
intelligence

stress coping &
relaxation strategy

higher self-esteem

more sexual
pleasure overall

more favorable
body image

Consider for yourself again, how you
treat yourself and what you can still do.
E.g. time outside in nature

Everyday life - summary

Everyday working life
→ sick days, taboo
topics, vacation days

Private tensions

circle of friends

Relationship

Self-love

Cycle irregularities

Irregularities are normal and factors such as stress, illness or climate play a role
Hormonal system controls the cycle → imbalance in hormones leads to irregularities (hormonal contraception)



ALWAYS in case of longer
lasting irregularities

Contact a Doctor

Visit the menstrual island once a month

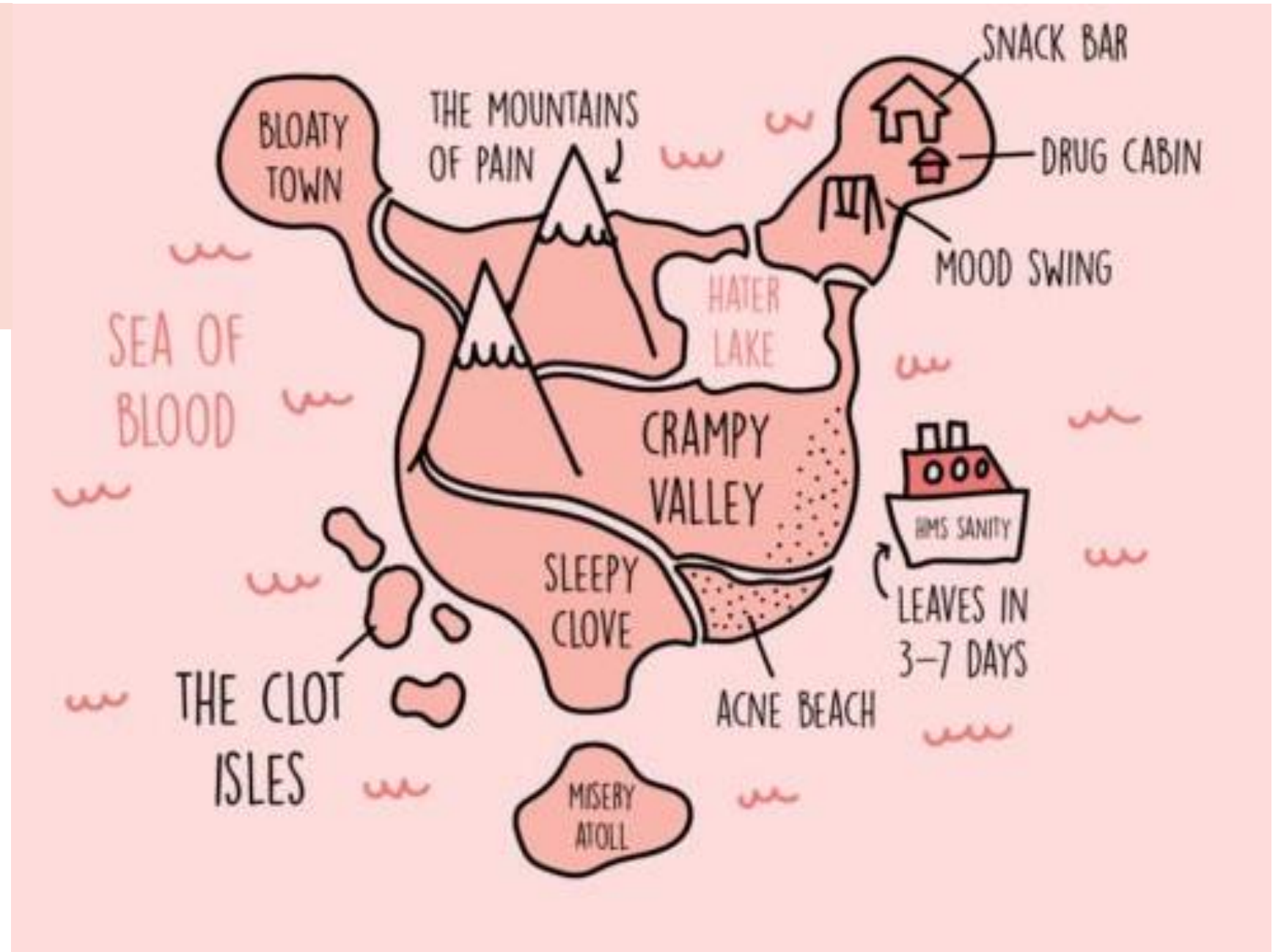


Image 3: menstrual island

How were you educated about the menstrual cycle?

Not at all

By my
mother

By my
father

By another close
relative

By a teacher

By friends

By the
internet

By a doctor



Image 8: Ritualbath



Image 4: Hut



Image 7: Girl in hut



Image 5: Stop-sign

MUSLIM WOMEN GUIDE DURING THEIR PERIOD

[READ MORE](#)

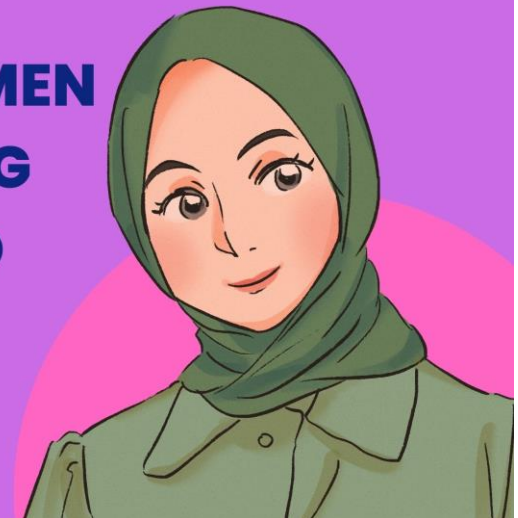


Image 6: Guide

Cultural and religious differences

How does your environment deal with your menstrual bleeding?

Christianity	Judaism	Islam	Hinduism	Buddhism
<p>Old Testament: bleeding woman is unclean for 7 days</p> <p>Everything that comes into contact with her must be cleansed</p>	<p>Family purity law</p> <p>→ Woman is considered ritually impure during menstruation (not hygienic)</p> <p>→ 7 days after the bleeding has ended, the woman may go to the Mikwa (ritual bath) and then have physical contact with her husband again</p> <p>→ Code of conduct during the period of impurity</p>	<p>Rules/prohibitions for menstruating women:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No ritual prayers - No ritual fasting (will be made up later) - No sexual intercourse - No touching of the Quraan - No retreat to the mosque <p>Bleeding = “suffering”</p>	<p>Menstruation = unclean</p> <p>Tradition: banish woman from family life (e.g. stable)</p> <p>→ Limitation / Exclusion for 3 days</p> <p>→ No secular activities or religious activities</p> <p>→ Partial refusal of professional religious positions</p>	<p>Also impurity of the menstruating woman, partial devaluation of women</p> <p>→ similar to other religions</p>

Cultural and religious differences

Alleged exception among religions: *Sikhism*

- Positive approach in the writings
- Menstruation = a gift from God
- Consideration as a biological process
- Strong condemnation of discrimination against menstruating women

Cultural and religious differences & stigmatization

Antique:
Myths and Beliefs
→ Menstruation always “powerful”
Positive: holiness, well-being
Negative: Dangerous, sign of sin



Religious views
→ Largely negative backgrounds
→ influencing today’s perspective
→ Science at the beginning of the 20th century

Menstruation taboo & stigmatization

Unusual topic of conversation

Today's reactions of the man

Commonly associated feelings

Today's behavior of women (hiding)

Recognition in the world of work

Advertisements without blood (blue liquid instead)

Hardly any research in science

Conclusion

Find your own way to feel comfortable and be open about it in your private and public life.

How informed do you feel about your female cycle?

Not at all

A little better,
but still not
really enough.

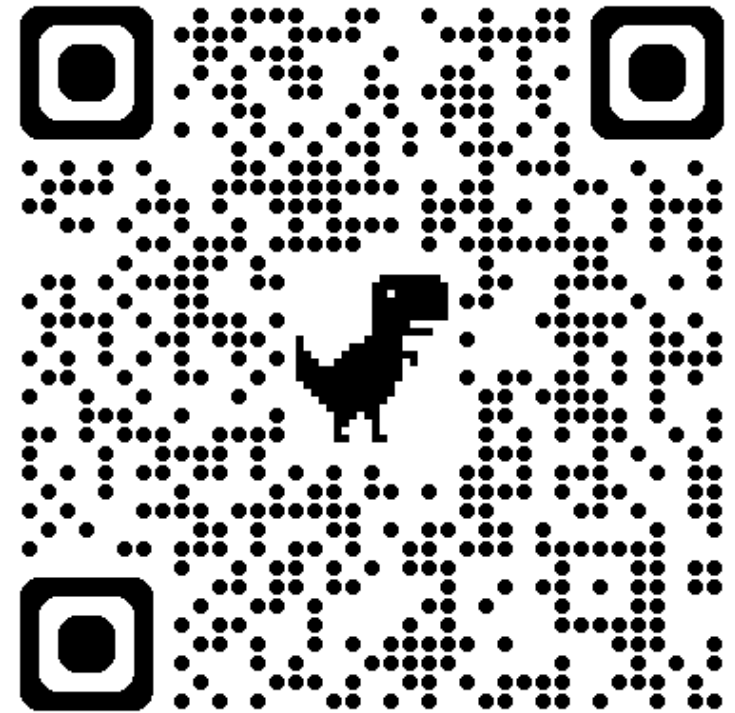
Definitely better
than before and
I feel safer.

Very good

Feedback and slides



Feedback word cloud



QR-Code to our iLearn website
for the slides

Image sources

Image 1: Cartoon Sara Andersen: Accessed from

<https://www.watson.ch/imgdb/a78d/Qx,B,0,0,605,917,252,382,100,152/862727736236575> on 27/04/24

Picture 2: Female sexual organs: Accessed from

<https://www.apotheken-umschau.de/mein-koerper/weibliche-gesexorgane/weibliche-gesexorgane-anatomie-708673.html#innere-gesexorgane> on 27/04/24

Picture 3: Menstrual island: Accessed from

<https://www.odoc.life/blog/little-girls-first-period/> on 08/06/24

Image sources

- Image 4: Hut: Accessed from: <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2020/06/why-does-hinduism-still-insist-on-impurity-of-menstruation/> on 08.06.24
- Image 5: Stop-sign: Accessed from: <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2015/12/12/indian-women-flout-menstrual-taboos-by-saying> on 08.06.24
- Image 6: Guide: Accessed from: <https://bayanulquran-academy.com/women-in-islam-during-period/> on 08.06.24
- Image 7: Girl in hut: Accessed from: <https://globalhistorydialogues.org/projects/menstrual-confinement-in-nepal-restrictions-and-taboos/> on 08.06.24
- Image 8: Ritualbath: Accessed from: <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article135906125/Den-Kopf-unter-Wasser-dem-Himmel-ganz-nah.html#cs-lazy-picture-placeholder-01c4eedaca.png> on 08.06.24

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