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Coaching HER® Menstrual Health Module 1: Understanding the Complete Menstrual Cycle

KEY TERMS

Menstrual Cycle

The monthly hormonal cycle for people who experience menstruation as a part of their reproductive health. Menstrual cycles typically last about 28 days, but this range varies from person to person and can change due to a variety of factors.

Menstrual Stigma

Negative perceptions about menstruation, especially the view that menstruating bodies are unclean, abnormal or weak and that discussing menstruation is inappropriate or rude. Stigma is a social construct that compels people to keep menstruation concealed and prevents important discussion on menstrual health.

Menstruation

Menstruation is the first part of the menstrual cycle, when the uterine lining (endometrium) and unfertilized egg are shed from the uterus, through the cervix and out of the body through the vagina.

Follicular Phase

This is the low hormone phase. The first half of the menstrual cycle, including menstruation. Following menstruation, estrogen gradually increases which helps many people feel energized, confident, and sociable. During this phase, the uterus is preparing to receive an egg.

Ovulation

During ovulation, an egg is released from one of the ovaries, travels through a fallopian tube to the uterus. This is the fertile time in a person's menstrual cycle, when they can become pregnant.

Luteal Phase

This is the high hormone phase. This phase occurs if an egg is not fertilized. During the luteal phase, the uterus prepares to shed its lining and the unfertilized egg. In the late luteal, hormonal changes can cause many difficult symptoms such as cramps, fatigue, higher body temperatures, and more.

Relative Energy Deficiency Syndrome (RED-S)

When people do not have sufficient energy from nutrition, hydration and rest to perform their physical activities. RED-S is particularly concerning for female athletes, who have varying nutritional needs throughout their cycle and may feel pressured to eat less to meet body standards (disordered eating).

Female Athlete Triad

A related problem to RED-S, which includes the relationship between disordered eating, decreased bone mineral density and menstrual disturbances.

Menstrual Health Disorders

Endometriosis is a painful condition when the uterine lining (endometrium) grows outside of the uterus, often causing severe pain and swelling during menstruation. Research is lacking on this condition, but an estimated 10% of menstruating people in the U.S. suffer from endometriosis.

Amenorrhea (A-men-oh-ria)

When a person stops getting their period for 3 months or more, while not on any hormonal contraceptives or pregnant. Amenorrhea can happen if your body fat drops so low that ovulation stops.