

ROOTED IN RHYTHM

A Guide to Menstrual Self-Care & Cyclical Living for Women and Girls

Weaving Ancient Wisdom & Modern Science



Rest. Nourish. Attune. Repeat.



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Your monthly bleed is a doorway, a pathway to a higher intelligence: the wisdom of your own body.

We are often taught to treat our periods as an inconvenience: something to hide, push through, and manage so we can keep up with the pace of the world. But what if your menses is not an interruption to your life, but an invitation into a deeper part of it?

A Time of Turning Inward

Each cycle moves like the seasons. Menstrual energy draws us inward. The body asks us to slow down, rest, and release. This is not weakness. It is the natural rhythm of a living, cyclical being.

When we honor this time instead of overriding it, we create space to listen. In the quiet, many women notice that intuition sharpens, feelings rise closer to the surface, and the noise of everyday demands softens. What we usually rush past becomes clear.

The Body as Messenger

Your cycle is a monthly report on your wellbeing. It has been referred to as the fifth vital sign. The way you feel before and during your period can reveal how you've been living: whether you've been resting enough, nourishing yourself, carrying too much stress, or holding emotions you haven't had space to feel. Irritability may point to boundaries that need tending. Fatigue may be asking for rest you've been postponing. Tears may be carrying something that wants to be released.

Rather than silencing these messages, we can meet them with curiosity. What is my body asking for? What am I ready to let go of?

Listening also means taking your body seriously when something feels wrong. Severe pain, very heavy bleeding, or symptoms that disrupt your life are not something to simply endure. They deserve care and attention from a trusted provider.

A Practice of Release and Renewal

Every month, the body sheds what it no longer needs and prepares to begin again. We can mirror this emotionally and spiritually, using our bleed as a sacred pause to reflect, clear what feels heavy, and set intentions for the cycle ahead.

Coming Home

When we stop seeing our menses as a burden, we begin to reclaim something ancient. Women across cultures and generations have honored this time as one of power, insight, and connection. Your cycle is not something happening *to* you. It is a rhythm moving *through* you, guiding you back, month after month, to your own inner knowing.



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The Intention for This Guide

Menstruation is a rite of passage.

From the first bleed to the last, it marks our becoming - girl to woman, maiden to mother, whether of children, of creations, or of ourselves. Each cycle is an initiation, asking us to slow down, to listen, & to be reborn.

Our menstrual blood is sacred blood.

It is the only blood not shed from violence, or from a wound. It is born of life.

This is the blood that builds a home for new life, month after month. The blood that nourished every one of us before we took our first breath. It is life-giving, it always has been...

And somewhere along the way, we were taught to forget this. We were taught to hide our bleeding, to apologize for it, to see it as a burden, a mess, an inconvenience.

But when we remember this as truth, we heal.

We heal the shame that was handed down to us. We heal our relationship with our bodies. We heal something for the women who came before us, & for the daughters who will come after.

This is my intention in creating this guide.

That women may return to the origin of reverence for their menstruation. That we may come back to our wombs, to our feminine rhythms, to the ancient knowing that lives in our blood.

Because when a woman is connected to her womb, she is connected to the earth. Her cycles move with the moon & the seasons. She remembers that she is not separate from nature.

She is nature.

We are all one within this origin story. Every one of us was born of a woman's blood. Every one of us began in the womb.

May this guide be a doorway home - to your body, to the earth, to the Sacred within You.

Love,
Rosa

Welcome

This guide is an invitation — to slow down, listen inward, and rebuild a relationship with your body's own timekeeping system. Every woman and girl who menstruates moves through a cycle that is not flat or constant, but rhythmic: rising and falling in energy, mood, and focus across roughly a month, the same way the seasons rise and fall across a year.

Most of us were never taught this. We were handed a calendar built for a body that resets every 24 hours, and told to perform identically on day 3 of our cycle and day 23. This guide offers another way: understanding your four phases, and especially learning to truly tend to yourself during menstruation, when your body is asking the most clearly to be cared for.

A note before you begin: this guide shares wellness and cycle-awareness practices, not medical advice. It is meant to sit alongside — never replace — the care of a doctor, midwife, or gynecologist, especially if your periods are very painful, irregular, or you live with a condition like PCOS or endometriosis.

Your Body Keeps a Different Clock: The 28-Day Cycle

A woman's menstrual cycle is, on average, a 28-day rhythm — counted from the first day of one period to the first day of the next. Twenty-eight days is a useful average and a helpful frame for understanding the pattern, though anywhere from about 21 to 35 days is considered developmentally normal, and your own length may vary somewhat from month to month. What matters most is not hitting an exact number, but recognizing the shape of the pattern underneath it.

Across those days, your body moves through four distinct phases — menstrual, follicular, ovulatory, and luteal — each governed by a different balance of hormones (mainly estrogen, progesterone, follicle-stimulating hormone, and luteinizing hormone). These hormones don't just govern fertility. They also shape your energy, mood, appetite, sociability, sleep, and even how your mind likes to work, in a pattern that repeats month after month.

This monthly cycle is sometimes called an infradian rhythm — a biological rhythm longer than a single day. It runs alongside (and is just as real as) your circadian rhythm, the roughly 24-hour clock that governs sleep and wakefulness. We talk about the circadian rhythm often.

The infradian rhythm, despite shaping the daily experience of roughly half the population for most of their lives, rarely gets named at all.

Why the 9-to-5 Wasn't Built for Us

The modern workday assumes a body that performs at a consistent baseline every single day: same hours, same expected output, same energy, Monday through Friday, week after week. That structure is built around the circadian rhythm — wake, work, sleep, repeat — and it takes no account of the monthly rhythm layered on top of it.

For a cycling body, that's a mismatch. Energy, focus, verbal fluency, and appetite for socializing all shift across the month, in a pattern that's hormonally driven rather than a matter of willpower or discipline. Expecting your ovulatory-phase output on a menstrual-phase day isn't ambition — it's working against your own physiology, and over months and years, that mismatch is part of what drives burnout, brain fog, and the sense of being permanently a little behind.

You may not be able to overhaul your work schedule around your cycle — few of us can. But you can start noticing the pattern, and wherever you have any choice at all — which days you schedule big presentations, when you take on new projects versus tie up loose ends, when you push and when you protect rest — you can begin to let your calendar bend toward your biology instead of only ever bending against it.

The Four Phases of Your Cycle

Here is the pattern at a glance. The day ranges below are approximate — use them as a compass, not a rulebook, and expect your own cycle to vary.

Phase	Approx. Days*	Key Hormones	Energy Pattern	Inner Season
Menstrual	Days 1–5	Estrogen & progesterone at their lowest point of the month	Lowest energy — the body turns inward to rest and release	Inner Winter
Follicular	Days ≈ 6–13	Estrogen rises steadily; FSH matures a new egg	Energy climbs — clarity, motivation,	Inner Spring

Phase	Approx. Days*	Key Hormones	Energy Pattern	Inner Season
			and mood lift	
Ovulatory	Days ≈ 14–16	Estrogen peaks; LH surges to release the egg	Peak energy — confidence, stamina, and connection	Inner Summer
Luteal (early & late)	Days ≈ 17–28	Progesterone rises, then falls with estrogen near cycle's end	Energy tapers — steady at first, then slows and turns inward	Inner Autumn

**Based on an average 28-day cycle, counting Day 1 as the first day of bleeding. Shorter or longer cycles shift these ranges proportionally.*

MENSTRUAL PHASE *Inner Winter · Days 1–5*

Hormones: This is the phase where estrogen and progesterone are both at the lowest point of the entire month. That hormonal low is exactly what triggers your uterine lining to release. It's also, quite directly, why fatigue, low mood, or a strong pull toward solitude in these days is a hormonal reality, not a personal shortcoming.

Energy: The lowest of the whole cycle, especially on the first one to two days of heaviest flow. Your body is doing real internal work — shedding, repairing, and resetting — and that work has a metabolic cost, even though it's invisible from the outside.

Mind & mood: Attention naturally turns inward. Many women notice heightened intuition, more vivid dreams, and a felt sense of clarity or insight during this window — sometimes described as the moment when “downloads” arrive most easily, simply because the hormones that usually pull focus outward have quieted down, leaving more room to listen inward.

What to prioritize: Rest above all, warmth, and as few obligations as you can manage — especially on day one.

FOLLICULAR PHASE *Inner Spring · Days ≈ 6–13*

Hormones: Estrogen begins climbing steadily from its cycle-low, while follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) rises to prompt the ovaries to mature a new egg. This is a genuinely rebuilding phase, hormonally and physically.

Energy: Rises day over day. Brain fog lifts, stamina returns, and for many women this feels like the most noticeably “better” stretch of the month, almost like waking back up.

Mind & mood: Curiosity, optimism, and mental sharpness tend to peak in the second half of this phase. It's a strong window for learning something new, planning ahead, brainstorming, and re-engaging socially at your own pace.

In the body, sleep and skin often improve.

Cervical fluid moves from dry to sticky to creamy as estrogen climbs.

Like spring, this is a lovely time for new beginnings, planning, learning, and more active movement.

OVULATORY PHASE *Inner Summer · Days ≈ 14–16*

Hormones: Estrogen reaches its peak for the month, triggering a sharp surge in luteinizing hormone (LH) — the signal that causes the ovary to release a mature egg. Testosterone also ticks up slightly during this short window.

Energy: The highest of the entire cycle. Stamina, verbal fluency, confidence, and a pull toward connection with others tend to peak together here.

Cervical fluid becomes clear, slippery, and stretchy like egg white, and some women notice a twinge of ovulation pain or light spotting.

This is the most fertile time of the cycle.

Like summer, it's a beautiful time for connection, collaboration, important conversations, and your most energetic movement.

LUTEAL PHASE *Early & Late stages Inner Autumn · Days ≈ 17–28*

Hormones: After the egg releases, the structure left behind (the corpus luteum) produces progesterone, which rises through the first half of this phase. If pregnancy doesn't occur, both progesterone and estrogen fall sharply in the final days — and that drop is what triggers your next period. This stage is more appropriately broken up into two phases:

The Early Luteal Phase

The early luteal phase spans roughly days 15 to 21, the week just after ovulation. During this time, progesterone rises steadily toward its peak, while estrogen has a smaller second rise.

Energy tends to feel steady and grounded, and many women feel calm, settled, and focused. In the body, temperature rises slightly and stays up, appetite may increase.

Cervical fluid becomes dry or sticky.

Like late summer turning toward autumn, this is a lovely time for finishing projects, nesting, and enjoying moderate movement.

The Late Luteal Phase

The late luteal phase covers roughly days 22 to 28, the week before bleeding begins. If pregnancy hasn't occurred, progesterone and estrogen drop sharply, and energy begins to draw inward.

Energy - Many women feel more tired and more sensitive, and some feel irritable or tearful, though intuition is often heightened. The body may bring bloating, breast tenderness, cravings, and less restful sleep.

Cervical fluid stays mostly dry or sticky, sometimes with a brief wet patch just before bleeding.

Like deep autumn moving into winter, this phase asks for rest, warmth, gentle movement, and a lighter schedule

— think of it as building the runway for the rest your menstrual phase will need.

You are not the same every day of the month - and that is by design...

Tending to Yourself During Menstruation

Of all four phases, menstruation — and especially the first day or two of heaviest flow — asks the most of your body. It deserves the most deliberate, unapologetic care. Here is how to meet that ask.

1. Rest, Especially on Day One

Shedding the uterine lining involves real physical work: your uterus contracts (which is what causes cramping), inflammatory compounds called prostaglandins are released, and iron is

lost along with blood. It is entirely appropriate for energy to be at its lowest right now. Treat at least the first day of your period as a reset day wherever you possibly can — clear your schedule of anything nonessential, prioritize sleep and naps, and let yourself lie down with a heating pad without guilt.

2. Warm Liquids — Including NORAH Tea

Warmth is soothing to cramping muscles and supports circulation. In many traditional healing systems — including Traditional Chinese Medicine — cold drinks during menstruation are thought to constrict blood vessels and intensify cramping, while warm liquids are believed to ease it. At minimum, favor warm water, herbal tea, or broth over ice-cold drinks during your period.

What is NORAH Tea?

NORAH is an acronym for a traditional herbal infusion blending four nutrient-rich herbs: Nettle, Oatstraw, Red Raspberry leaf, Alfalfa & Rose Hips

- **Nettle** is prized as a nutrient powerhouse — rich in iron, calcium, and magnesium — which can be especially supportive while you're losing blood.
- **Oatstraw** is a calming nervine, traditionally used to soothe and nourish the nervous system.
- **Red raspberry leaf** is a classic herb in women's wellness traditions, valued for gently toning the uterus.
- **Alfalfa** is a gentle, mineral-rich herb traditionally used to build nutritional reserves.
- **Rose Hips** are packed with Vitamin C which helps strengthen your immune system and provides high level of antioxidants.

A full write up of its benefits and how to prepare are at the end of this Ebook.

This is a traditional herbal preparation, not a clinically proven treatment. If you're pregnant, nursing, on medication, or managing a hormone-sensitive condition, check in with a doctor, midwife, or qualified herbalist before adding it to your routine.

Other easy warm options: ginger tea, warm lemon water, chamomile, or a simple mineral-rich broth — any of them sipped slowly, ideally away from a screen.

3. Warm, Cooked Foods

Favor cooked, warming meals — soups, stews, roasted vegetables, and dishes built around warming spices like ginger and cinnamon — over cold, raw, or iced foods during your period. Many traditional food-as-medicine practices treat this as a way of supporting digestion and circulation while your body is already working hard. It's also a good window to lean on iron-rich foods, such as leafy greens, lentils, and (if you eat it) red meat, to help replenish what's lost with your flow.

4. Skip the Strenuous Exercise

With hormones and energy at their monthly low, this is not the window for high-intensity training, heavy lifting, or pushing through a hard workout out of habit or guilt. Gentle walking, restorative or yin yoga, and simple stretching are plenty of movement for these days — or none at all, if rest is what your body is asking for. Save your harder training sessions for the follicular and ovulatory phases, when your body is genuinely primed to meet them. This isn't about doing less because you're capable of less; it's about working with your physiology instead of overriding it.

5. Less Screen Time

Screens are stimulating — they keep your nervous system leaning toward “go” mode right when your body is asking to shift into “rest and digest.” Cutting back on scrolling and screen exposure during your period supports better sleep and melatonin production, and it clears space for the quieter, more inward-facing state this phase naturally invites.

6. More Quiet Time

Build in unstructured downtime on purpose: journal, nap, sit in silence, or simply do nothing for a while. This is a genuine low point in your month, physically and emotionally, and the body is asking for less input, not more. Honoring that now tends to make the rest of the month feel more spacious, too.

An additional note on “More Quiet Time”:

During menstruation, the veil between our everyday awareness and our deeper inner knowing grows thin.

This is the time when a woman's intuition is most awake. Our psychic senses heighten. Our dreams grow more vivid. The insights that are usually drowned out by the noise of daily life begin to surface, asking to be heard.

But this Medicine only reaches us when we make room for it.

When we carve out spaciousness during our bleed — rest, quiet, less screens, more stillness — we create the conditions for these downloads to land. We open a channel.

This is why asking ourselves to keep moving at the same pace all month long costs us so much. It asks us to override the very portal that wants to open.

So this month, I invite You to protect that spaciousness. To let the quiet in. To trust what rises when You finally stop & listen.

7. Connecting with Nature and the Earth

Spend time outside where you can — sit or walk barefoot on grass or soil (sometimes called “grounding” or “earthing”), watch the sky, or sit near water or trees. Many women describe menstruation as the time in their cycle when intuition speaks loudest and creative or spiritual insight arrives most clearly — the natural result of a hormonally quiet phase that turns attention inward. Time in nature tends to support that inward listening. Keep a journal nearby during these days, so that whatever surfaces — an idea, a feeling, a piece of clarity — has somewhere to land.

A Simple Ritual for Day One

If you can build only one habit from this guide, build this: protect at the very least the first day of your period as sacred, low-demand time. Here's a simple sequence to return to each month.

- ♡ Wake without an alarm, if your circumstances allow it.
- ♡ Hydrate first thing with warm water or a cup of NORAH tea.
- ♡ Eat a warm, nourishing breakfast rather than something cold or rushed.
- ♡ Clear your calendar of anything that isn't essential.
- ♡ Move only if it feels good — a slow walk, gentle stretch, tai chi, chi gong, yin yoga, breathwork are some gentle movement practices.
- ♡ Put your phone away for a real stretch of the day.
- ♡ Spend a few minutes outside, barefoot on the ground if you can.
- ♡ Rest without guilt — nap, journal, or simply lie down.
- ♡ Notice anything that surfaces — a thought, an image, a feeling — and write it down.

How Hormones Shape Immunity

It's important to note that our immune system isn't constant across the month — it shifts in step with your hormones. The main dip in overall immune activity actually happens during the luteal phase, the second half of your cycle leading up to your period, when progesterone peaks and estrogen falls. The days of bleeding are a little different: hormones sit at their lowest baseline, but locally, inflammation spikes to help the uterine lining shed. [1][2][3][4]

Follicular Phase (First Half): As estrogen rises through this phase, it tends to boost immune cell activity, antibody production, and inflammatory response — this is generally when immune function is running at its strongest. [1][3]

Luteal Phase (Second Half): Once progesterone rises and estrogen drops, overall immune and inflammatory responses are dampened, part of the body's preparation for a potential pregnancy. This is the phase most associated with lowered immune resilience. [2][3]

Menstruation (The Period): Both estrogen and progesterone hit their lowest points of the month. At the same time, local prostaglandins and inflammatory markers spike, driving the process of shedding the uterine lining. [1][4][5]

What This Can Mean for Your Body

Infections: Because the days after ovulation and before your period are the most immunosuppressed stretch of the month, your body may be slightly less equipped to fend off new bacteria or viruses during this window. [3][6]

Autoimmune and Inflammatory Conditions: For anyone living with an overactive-immune-system condition — autoimmune flare-ups, allergies, asthma — symptoms often worsen right before or during a period, as shifting hormone levels and a local spike in inflammation collide. [5][7][8]

Nutritional Stress: Blood loss during your period lowers iron levels, which can bring on fatigue and, indirectly, leave your body less resilient to everyday stress.

This is why it's very important to take care of ourselves during the rest of the month, so we have a better standing during our hormonal and immunity dip that occurs.

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A deeper dive on Ancient Wisdom through the lens of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

The Three Golden Opportunities: A TCM Perspective

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has long recognized three pivotal chapters in a woman's life — moments of real physiological change, when deliberate rest and self-care can rebuild deep reserves and support lifelong health. These same chapters can also bring vulnerability: when the body's signals go unheeded, they can deplete its vital reserves instead of renewing them.

What Is Jing, and Why Does It Matter?

Jing — often translated as Essence or Vitality — underlies a woman's hormonal life. There is no direct translation for Jing in Western language. It shapes, and is shaped by, ovulation, menstruation, fertility, pregnancy, postpartum, and menopause. Stored in the Kidney and reproductive organs, Jing carries our genetic inheritance and determines the strength of our constitution. It is influenced by diet, lifestyle, and herbs. It relates to our constitution (your unique, relatively stable baseline of physical, physiological, and psychological traits) Kidney Jing guides our maturation, development, and our reproduction.

Women lose Jing through loss of their eggs, either during menstruation, or pregnancy. Women's cultivation of Jing focuses on lessening menstrual flow, menstrual and postpartum recovery, as well as adequate spacing of birth of their children.

We can conserve what we inherited by practicing moderation, good nutrition, and breathing and meditation techniques. We can also dissipate our Jing by living out of alignment with our natural rhythms. This is why optimizing our menstrual health as women is vital for our overall health and longevity.

Jing is one of TCM's Three Treasures, alongside Qi (circulating energy) and Shen (spirit). Each of the three golden opportunities below is a moment when Jing is at risk of depletion — which is exactly why tending to it during these windows matters so much for a long, vital life.

The Three Golden Opportunities

Each of these life chapters is a gateway: a time when the body is already doing profound work, and can be supported toward greater strength rather than left to deplete.

Golden Opportunity	The TCM Concept & Purpose
1. The Menstrual Cycle (Monthly)	The Micro-Gateway. A monthly reset that clears old, stagnant blood and builds fresh Yin, Blood, and Qi (Chi) — and offers a continuous window into your overall internal harmony.
2. Postpartum (Zuo Yuezi, or “Sitting the Month”)	The Healing Gateway. The first 30 to 40 days after childbirth, when pregnancy and delivery have deeply depleted a woman's Blood and Essence. This window calls for real physical rest, warming food, and full replenishment, to help prevent long-term fatigue or pain.
3. Perimenopause & Menopause (The Second Spring)	The Wisdom Gateway. The transition out of the reproductive years, often beginning around age 35. TCM frames this not as loss, but as a Second Spring — a redirection of energy from growing a family toward nourishing your own heart, spirit, and longevity.



Why the Menstrual Cycle Is Your Longest-Standing Opportunity

Postpartum happens only a few times in life, if at all, and menopause arrives once. The menstrual cycle, by contrast, returns hundreds of times across thirty to forty years — making it the most frequent, and in many ways the most powerful, opportunity you have to support your long-term health.

- **A continuous diagnostic report** — In TCM, your period functions as a monthly report card. Cycle length, the color of your blood, and the presence of pain or PMS all reflect whether your Liver Qi is flowing freely, your Kidney energy is running low, or your body is under more stress than it can handle. You don't have to wait decades to see whether your lifestyle is working — your body reports back every month.
- **Small, compounding habits** — Because your cycle returns every month, it offers a recurring window to heal. If one month asks more of you than you had to give, you can intentionally rest, warm, and replenish during the next bleed. Honored over decades, this monthly rhythm builds a deep reserve of vital essence — making the transitions of postpartum and menopause, when they come, considerably smoother.

Understanding your cycle's inner seasons — and caring for yourself through its Winter, the bleed — is one of the simplest, most repeatable ways to preserve Jing and prepare your body for the cycle ahead.

Cycle Tracking Chart

Track your cycle day by day. Noting your phase, flow, energy, and mood over time helps you learn your own rhythm.

Menstrual · Inner Winter		Follicular · Inner Spring		Ovulatory · Inner Summer		Luteal · Inner Autumn	
Day	Date	Phase	Flow	Energy (1–5)	Mood / Symptoms	Notes	
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Day	Date	Phase	Flow	Energy (1-5)	Mood / Symptoms	Notes
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7						
8						
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Cycles vary in length — use only as many rows as your cycle needs, and let day 1 mark the first day of bleeding.

Stress, Hormones, and Premenstrual Self-Care

How Stress Affects Our Hormones

In the days before your period, estrogen and progesterone naturally drop. This shift is a normal part of every cycle, and it's linked to the tiredness, irritability, low mood, and sensitivity many of us feel during that time.

Stress and overextending ourselves can make this harder. When we push through without rest, the body releases more cortisol, the main stress hormone. Over time, high stress can disrupt the signals between the brain and the ovaries that regulate the cycle. This can lower progesterone in particular, the hormone that has a calming, soothing effect, and in some cases it can affect ovulation itself. Stress also makes the brain more sensitive to the premenstrual hormone shift, so the same natural drop can feel much stronger. The result is often deeper fatigue, shorter patience, and more intense symptoms.

How Self-Care Helps

When we tend to ourselves during the premenstrual phase, we support the body instead of fighting it. Nurturing practices like gentle touch, massage, warm baths, rest, deep breathing, and connection with people we love encourage the release of **oxytocin**, often called the "bonding" or "calming" hormone.

Oxytocin acts as a natural counterbalance to stress. It helps lower cortisol, calms the nervous system, and creates a sense of safety and ease in the body. By reducing the stress load, self-care creates a healthier environment for our reproductive hormones to stay in balance across the cycle, and it softens how strongly we feel the premenstrual shift.

Simple Ways to Nurture Yourself Before Your Period

- Slow down your schedule where you can and protect your sleep.
- Try gentle movement such as walking, stretching, or yoga instead of intense workouts.
- Practice self-massage, including the breast massage for relaxation.
- Take a warm bath or use a heating pad.
- Spend time with people who make you feel safe and cared for.

- Eat regular, nourishing meals and stay hydrated.
- Say no to extra commitments when you're feeling depleted.

Cervical Fluid: The Body's Monthly Messenger

What Cervical Fluid Is

Cervical fluid, also called cervical mucus, is made by glands in the cervix. Its texture, amount and appearance change through the cycle in response to two hormones:

- **Estrogen** makes it wetter, clearer, stretchier and more plentiful.
- **Progesterone** makes it thick, sticky and scant, until it forms a protective plug in the cervix.

Because it responds so directly to these hormones, cervical fluid is one of the clearest signs of what's happening inside your body. It shows when estrogen is rising, when ovulation is near, and when progesterone has taken over.

Its Purpose

Cervical fluid acts as a gatekeeper.

- **On infertile days**, thick fluid blocks sperm and helps protect the uterus from bacteria.
- **On fertile days**, it becomes a nourishing pathway. Fertile fluid is about 98% water. It's less acidic than the vagina, which protects sperm. Its fibers line up into channels that guide sperm toward the uterus. In fertile fluid, sperm can live up to **5 days**. Without it, they survive only a few hours.

How It Changes Through the Cycle

1. Menstruation

Fluid is hidden by blood.

2. After the period: dry days

There's little or no fluid, and the vulva feels dry. Estrogen is still low.

3. Early follicular phase: sticky

As estrogen begins to rise, fluid appears in small amounts.

- *Color:* cloudy white or slightly yellowish
- *Texture:* sticky, tacky, pasty or crumbly, and breaks apart when stretched
- *Sensation:* dry to slightly damp
- *Meaning:* fertility is starting to rise

4. Approaching ovulation: creamy

- *Color:* white or creamy
- *Texture:* smooth and lotion-like, stretches a little before breaking
- *Sensation:* moist or wet
- *Meaning:* estrogen is climbing and fertility is increasing

5. Peak fertility: egg-white

- *Color:* clear, sometimes with a little cloudiness
- *Texture:* slippery and stretchy like raw egg white, often stretching an inch or more between the fingers. It can also be watery.
- *Sensation:* wet, slippery, lubricated
- *Meaning:* estrogen is at its peak, and this is the most fertile time

The **Peak Day** is the last day of this slippery fluid or sensation. Ovulation usually happens within about a day of it.

6. After ovulation: luteal phase

Within a day or two of ovulation, progesterone rises and the fluid changes quickly.

- *Color:* cloudy, white or none
- *Texture:* thick and sticky, or dry
- *Sensation:* dry or sticky
- *Meaning:* ovulation has passed, and fertility has closed for this cycle

Some women notice a brief wet or watery patch just before their period, as hormones drop.

This sudden shift from wet to dry is one of the clearest signs that ovulation has passed.

What Color Tells Us

- **Clear:** high estrogen, fertile
- **White or creamy:** rising fertility, or after ovulation when thick
- **Pale yellow when dried on underwear:** usually normal
- **Pink or brown:** old blood or light spotting. Some women spot at ovulation.
- **Signs to check with a provider:** green, gray or yellow-green fluid; a fishy or strong odor; a frothy or cottage-cheese texture; or itching, burning or irritation. These can point to an infection.

Cervical Fluid as Information

Cervical fluid also gives a monthly picture of hormonal health.

- **A clear fertile pattern** suggests estrogen is rising well and the body is moving toward ovulation.
- **Little or no fertile fluid** may reflect low estrogen, stress, breastfeeding, perimenopause or a cycle without ovulation.
- **Long or repeated patches of fertile fluid** can sometimes happen with PCOS or when ovulation is delayed.
- **A short time between Peak Day and the period** may point to a short luteal phase, which is worth discussing with a provider if you're trying to conceive.

Fertility awareness methods use this information. Some, like the **Billings Ovulation Method** and **Creighton Model**, track fluid alone. The **Sympto-Thermal Method** pairs fluid with basal body temperature. Using these methods to avoid pregnancy works best with proper training.

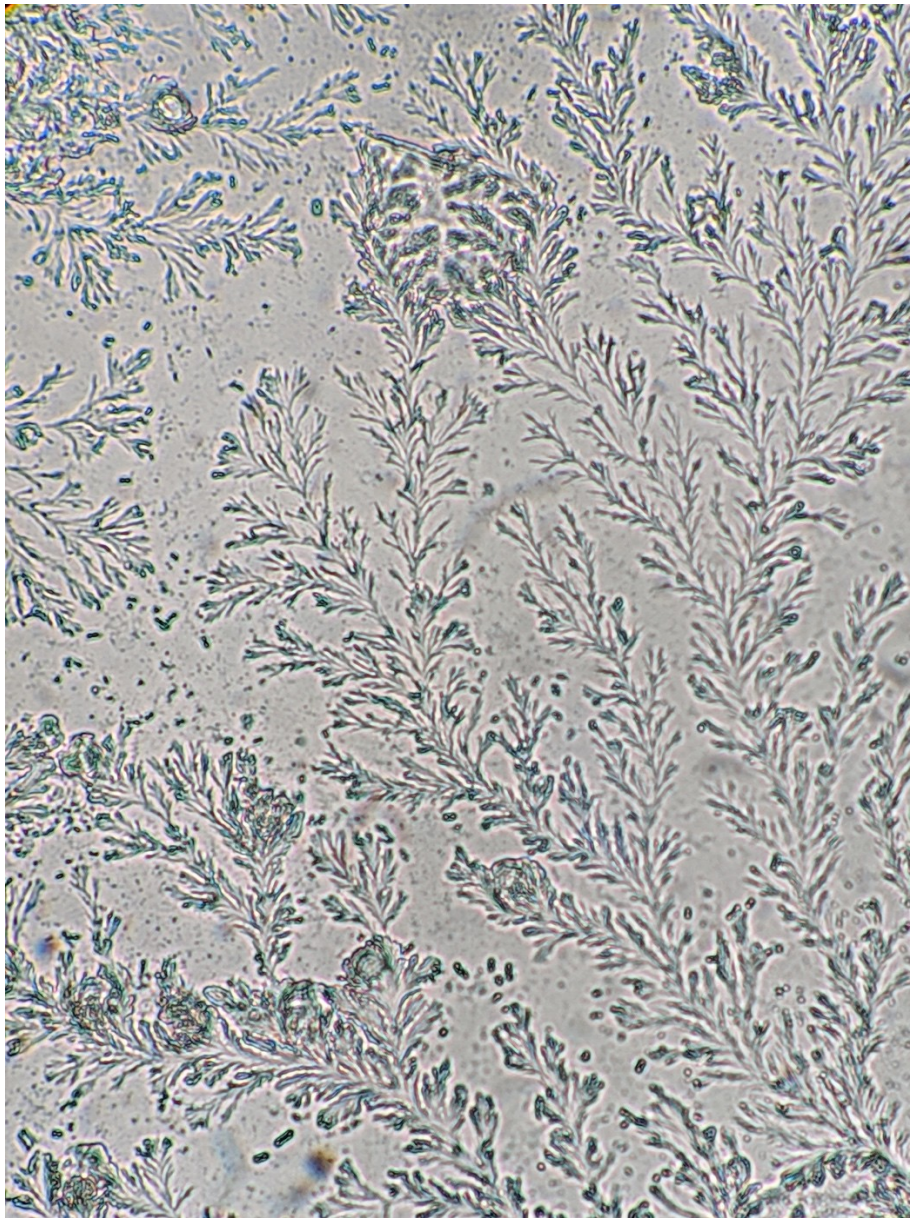
How to Observe Your Fluid

- **Notice the sensation** at the vulva through the day: dry, damp, wet or slippery. Sensation is often the most reliable sign.
- **Wipe with toilet paper** before urinating, and look at what's there.
- **Stretch it between your thumb and finger** to check texture.
- **Chart your most fertile sign each day**, such as dry, sticky, creamy or egg-white.
- **Track for at least three cycles** to learn your own pattern.

Things that can mask or change your fluid: hormonal birth control (it suppresses the natural pattern), semen, arousal fluid (it usually dries within an hour or so), lubricants, vaginal infections, and medications such as antihistamines.

Under the Microscope: Ferning

When fertile fluid dries on a glass slide, the salts in it crystallize into a branching pattern that looks like fern leaves. This happens only when estrogen is high, so ferning is a classic sign of approaching ovulation. After ovulation, progesterone changes the fluid, and the fern pattern disappears. Aren't our bodies amazing?



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The Wisdom of Cervical Fluid

Each day, your body tells you where you are in your cycle. Learning to read cervical fluid is learning one of the most direct forms of body literacy. You don't need any device, only attention.

What is Menstrual Blood?

It's Not All Blood

Period fluid isn't pure blood — it's a mix of blood, uterine lining tissue, and cervical mucus. One frequently cited study found the mix is only about 36% blood, with the other 64% made up of tissue, mucus, and small clots. That means if you collected 120 mL of total flow, only about 43 mL of it would be actual blood. [1]

Menstrual blood isn't just shed tissue — it also contains a population of stem cells, often called menstrual blood-derived mesenchymal stem/stromal cells, or MenSCs. Researchers first began isolating and studying them in the mid-to-late 2000s, and what makes them especially interesting is how they're collected: instead of a surgical procedure like a bone marrow biopsy, they can be gathered non-invasively, simply from menstrual fluid caught in a cup. [2]

Average Blood Volume Loss Per Cycle

It is actually a low volume: Despite feeling heavy, the total fluid lost over an average period is only about 30 to 50 milliliters — roughly 2 to 3 tablespoons. [3]

Signs of Heavy Bleeding

- Soaking through one or more pads, tampons, or cups every hour for several consecutive hours.
- Passing blood clots the size of a quarter or larger.
- Bleeding for longer than 7 days.
- Feeling constantly tired, weak, or short of breath during your period, which can be signs of anemia

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1. "How Much Blood Do You Lose on Your Period?" Healthline. <https://www.healthline.com/health/how-much-blood-do-you-lose-on-your-period>

2. Bozorgmehr, M., et al. "Endometrial and Menstrual Blood Mesenchymal Stem/Stromal Cells: Biological Properties and Clinical Application." *Frontiers in Cell and Developmental Biology*, 2020. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/cell-and-developmental-biology/articles/10.3389/fcell.2020.00497/full>

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Holistic Menstrual Hygiene Products

Menstrual Cups, tampons, pads, period underwear, sponges, oh my! Options to explore with our upcoming little ladies.

What to look for:

- **Unscented products.** Fragrances and added chemicals are among the most common causes of irritation, itching, and allergic reactions in this area.
- **Chlorine-free bleaching** (labeled TCF or ECF). Older bleaching methods left trace dioxins, and modern methods have greatly reduced this.
- **Organic cotton**, which is grown without synthetic pesticides and reduces the chance of pesticide residue.
- **Brands that disclose ingredients** and share independent third-party testing results.
- **Medical-grade silicone** for cups and discs, and PFAS-free certification for period underwear.

One important note for accuracy: "Organic" refers to how the cotton is grown. It doesn't guarantee a product is free of all contaminants. A 2024 UC Berkeley study found measurable levels of metals, including lead and arsenic, in tampons from several brands, both organic and non-organic. Organic tampons had less lead on average but more arsenic. So organic is a reasonable choice, but it's best paired with brand transparency and testing rather than treated as a guarantee on its own.

Menstrual Cups

- **How they work:** Folded and inserted into the vagina, where they collect (rather than absorb) menstrual fluid. Made from medical-grade silicone, rubber, or TPE.

- **Wear time:** Up to 12 hours, depending on flow.
- **Pros:**
 - Reusable for years so they're cost-effective long-term
 - Hold significantly more fluid than tampons or pads
 - Don't absorb the vagina's natural moisture, so there's less dryness or irritation
 - Less waste than disposable products
 - This is a very helpful way to track your menstrual volume
 - A wonderful way to retain menstrual flow if you'd like to return your blood back to the earth, a plant, for menstrual face masks, menstrual art, etc.
 - Allows swimming and all physical activity
- **Cons:**
 - Just like any product you use there's a learning curve for insertion and removal
In public bathrooms, you'll simply remove, empty, and reinsert
 - Must be emptied and rinsed during the day and cleaned with a mild cleanser between cycles
 - Finding the right size or fit may take trial and error
 - People with an IUD should discuss with their provider, be gentle to not pull during removal as strong suction may dislodge your IUD

Tampons

- **How they work:** A cotton or rayon plug inserted into the vagina that absorbs menstrual fluid. Available with or without an applicator
- **Wear time:** 4–8 hours. Never more than 8 hours
- **Pros:**
 - Discreet and widely available
 - Allow swimming and most physical activity
 - Easy to learn and quick to change
- **Cons:**
 - There's a small risk of Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS), especially with long wear or higher absorbency than needed
 - Can cause dryness because they absorb natural moisture
 - Single-use, so the cost adds up over time and they create waste

Pads (Disposable)

- **How they work:** Absorbent pads that stick to the inside of underwear and catch fluid outside the body.

- **Wear time:** Every 4–6 hours, or sooner if full
- **Pros:**
 - Nothing to insert, so they're easy for beginners
 - Come in many sizes and absorbencies, including overnight
 - Very low TSS risk
- **Cons:**
 - Can feel bulky and may shift or leak
 - Can't be worn while swimming
 - May cause chafing, irritation, or odor if not changed often
 - Single-use, so they create waste and ongoing cost

Period Underwear

- **How they work:** Underwear with built-in absorbent layers that catch and hold fluid.
- **Wear time:** Up to about 12 hours for light to moderate flow. Heavy flow may need more frequent changes or a backup product.
- **Pros:**
 - Comfortable and feel like regular underwear.
 - Reusable, which reduces waste.
 - Great as backup protection with a cup or tampon.
- **Cons:**
 - Higher upfront cost, and you need several pairs
 - Must be rinsed and washed after each use
 - May not be enough on heavy days
 - Some brands have faced concerns about PFAS chemicals, so check for third-party testing

Menstrual Discs

- **How they work:** A flexible, shallow disc inserted and tucked behind the pubic bone, sitting higher in the vagina than a cup to collect fluid. Available as disposable or reusable.
- **Wear time:** Up to 12 hours
- **Pros:**
 - High capacity, similar to cups
 - Don't rely on suction, which some find more comfortable and IUD-friendly
 - Some can be worn during intercourse
- **Cons:**

- o Removal can be messy
- o There's a learning curve to placing them correctly
- o Disposable versions create waste and ongoing cost

Embodiment Practices to Support Menstruation (or even in between cycles)

The Power of Breath

“Breath is a sacred bridge from fear to the radiance of presence. So, I return to my breath time and time again.” - Marsh Engle

Breathing techniques and patterns are regularly advocated for relaxation, stress management, control of psycho-physiological states and to improve organ function.

Conscious Breathing generally describes the act of developing a soft awareness of your breath as it moves in and out of your body. This practice can help you achieve a state of calm and presence so you can engage more deeply with life,

Conscious breathing might also help you navigate difficult thoughts, emotions and experiences, creating the space to respond with intention and objectivity.

In yoga philosophy the breath serves as both the vehicle and the measuring stick for the practice of awareness. It can guide you to a deeper connection with your body, mind, and the world around you.

Traditional yogic wisdom holds that it's physiologically impossible to be in a state of distress when the breath is smooth, calm, and regulated.

Conscious breathing benefits

Your breath directly affects your nervous system. Slow, deliberate breath activates the parasympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic nervous system is responsible for the rest and digest function, as opposed to the fight-flight-freeze response.

Research suggests that conscious breathing, often referred to as yogic breathing or pranayama offers a number of benefits. These include improvements in:

- mood
- Sleep
- blood pressure
- respiratory function
- metabolism and digestion
- concentration and focus
- nervous system regulation

The outcome of mastering this breath control is that an individual can voluntarily use these practices to ease stressful or discomforting situations. Anyone can learn how to deal with distractions and stress without having an emotionally stimulating physiological response. The research is very clear that breathing exercises can enhance parasympathetic tone, decrease sympathetic nervous activity, improve respiratory and cardiovascular function, decrease the effects of stress, and improve physical and mental health (Pal, Velkumary, and Madanmohan, 2004).

Calm Breathing or 3 Part Breath

This breath is used during strong cramping, in relaxation practice & whenever you feel stress arising and need grounding in with your body.

All of these breathing techniques are done through the nose.

The three-part breath (also called dirga pranayama, or sometimes "dimensional breath" because you're filling three distinct dimensions of the torso) is a slow, full-lung breathing practice. Here's how to walk through it:

Get settled. Sit comfortably with a long spine, or lie down if that's easier. Let your shoulders soften and close your eyes if that feels right. Take a few normal breaths first, just noticing your natural rhythm without changing anything.

Part one — the belly. Rest one or both hands on your lower belly. Inhale slowly through your nose and direct the breath low, letting your belly rise and expand like it's filling with air, like a balloon. Exhale and let it fall back down. Do this a few times until it feels natural.

Part two — the ribs. Once the belly breath feels easy, add the next layer: inhale into the belly first, then keep inhaling so the breath continues to expand your ribcage out to the sides. Exhale in reverse — ribs release first, then belly.

Part three — the chest. Now add the final layer: inhale into the belly, then the ribs, then let the breath rise just a little further into your upper chest, with a slight gentle lift of the collarbones. Exhale slowly in reverse, releasing the chest, then the ribs, then the belly.

Make it one continuous wave and inhale to a count of 4, and exhale to a count of 8. The goal isn't three separate sips of air — it's one smooth, unbroken inhale that flows through all three areas like a wave rising, followed by one smooth exhale that flows back down. With practice, this starts to feel fluid rather than mechanical.

Repeat for 5 to 10 rounds, or a few minutes. When you feel complete, take a moment to feel the effects of what conscious breathing, extending the length exhalation, and expanding the body with breath has on the mind, body & your energy.

Tips

Place your right hand on your Heart, left hand on your womb. This helps to connect back into our bodies. The hand over the womb will rise first on the inhalation, followed by the hand over the Heart.

You can practice this breath every day as often as you'd like, especially when feeling the heaviness of menstruation and its symptoms.

With practice, your body will begin to respond automatically to calm breathing, relaxing deeply & easily.

Breast Massage

Breast massage is a fundamental practice of women's Inner Alchemy, in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Regular practice regulates the hormones and lightens the flow of menstrual bleeding and volume. For the full benefits, you can begin the breast massage practice at any time during your cycle. If you want to lessen your period flow or breast tenderness, you can begin breast massage when you first feel premenstrual symptoms.

Breast Massage for Relaxation

Breast massage for relaxation uses light, soothing strokes to release upper-body tension, ease stress, and encourage the release of calming hormones like oxytocin. It takes about 10–15 minutes and can be done at home as part of a regular self-care ritual.

Preparation

- **Set the space:** Find a quiet, warm, and comfortable place to sit or lie down.
- **Clean hands:** Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- **Choose a glide:** Apply a few drops of massage oil, such as coconut, sweet almond, or jojoba. You can also do this during a shower with oil and warm water.
- **Breathe:** Take several slow, deep breaths before you begin to settle your body and mind.

Step-by-Step Relaxation Techniques

1. Collarbone and Neck Release

Place two fingers just above and below your collarbone. Gently stroke outward from the center of your throat toward your shoulders, 5 to 8 times. This encourages lymphatic flow and relaxes the neck and shoulders.

2. Gentle Circular Strokes

Cup one breast with your hand. Using the pads of your fingers, make soft, slow circles, moving outward from the areola toward the outer edges of the breast. Spend 2 to 3 minutes on each side, using very light, comforting pressure.

3. Armpit and Side Smoothing

Move your hand to the outer edge of your breast and the underarm area. Using your palm or finger pads, make smooth, sweeping strokes upward and inward toward the armpit. This

helps relieve tightness in the chest muscles and follows the natural direction of lymph drainage.

4. Lifting and Cupping

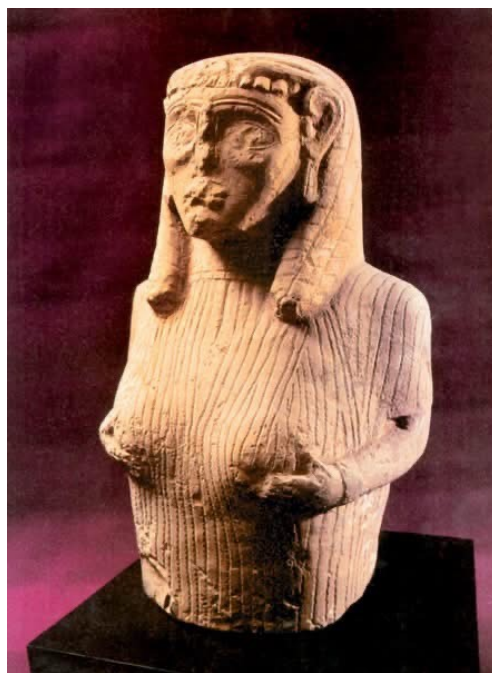
Gently cup the whole breast with your hand. Slowly lift it slightly away from the chest wall, hold for a couple of seconds, then lower it back down. Repeat five times to release tension in the surrounding tissue.

5. Closing

Finish with a few light, sweeping strokes from the center of the chest outward, followed by several slow, deep breaths.

Tips and Safety Notes

- **Keep the pressure light.** This is a relaxation practice, not deep-tissue work. It should never hurt.
- **Use it for breast awareness and self-love.** Regular massage helps you learn what's normal for your body, and connect with your heart space. It's a way to attune to your breast tissue as well; if you notice a new lump, thickening, skin changes, nipple discharge, or persistent pain, see your healthcare provider.



Statue of a goddess (circa 900-800 B.C.) She is depicted with her hands supporting or massaging her breasts. (photo credit: Zev Radovan) The Israel Museum in Jerusalem

Self-Pleasure as a Practice of Cyclical Self-Care

Self-pleasure is a natural, healthy way to reconnect with your body. Beyond pleasure itself, it can be a tool for relaxation, stress relief, and easing some of the discomforts of the menstrual cycle. When approached with presence and kindness, it becomes less about release and more about tending to yourself. Developing a regular self-pleasure practice is very healthy for mind, body & spirit.

A Flood of Feel-Good Chemistry

Arousal and orgasm release a cascade of natural brain chemicals:

- **Oxytocin**, the bonding and calming hormone, which helps lower cortisol and soothe the nervous system.
- **Endorphins**, the body's natural pain relievers, which can ease cramps and body aches.
- **Dopamine**, which lifts mood and motivation.
- **Prolactin**, released after orgasm, which brings a sense of satisfaction and supports restful sleep.

Together, these create a powerful counterbalance to stress. As we explored earlier, chronic stress is one of the biggest disruptors of a balanced cycle, so anything that helps the body shift out of "fight or flight" supports a healthier hormonal environment overall.

The Vagus Nerve and the Womb

The vagus nerve is the main pathway of the parasympathetic nervous system, the "rest and digest" state where the body heals, restores, and feels safe. Fascinating research by neuroscientist Barry Komisaruk found that the vagus nerve carries sensation directly from the cervix and uterus to the brain. This is part of why pleasure and orgasm are felt so deeply, throughout the whole body.

During orgasm, the uterus and pelvic floor contract in rhythmic pulses. Afterward, many people feel a wave of deep relaxation, slower breathing, and a calm, heavy softness. This is the parasympathetic nervous system at work. Regularly inviting the body into this state of safety and ease may help it settle into rest more readily over time.

Support for Premenstrual and Menstrual Symptoms

In the days before and during your period, self-pleasure can be a gentle form of relief:

- **Cramps:** The endorphins released, along with increased blood flow and the release of tension after uterine contractions, help many people find relief from menstrual cramps.
- **Mood:** Oxytocin and dopamine can ease irritability, anxiety, and low mood.
- **Sleep:** The relaxation and prolactin that follow orgasm can support deeper rest, which often suffers before menstruation.
- **Tension:** Increased circulation to the pelvis can soften the heavy, congested feeling some experience before bleeding.

Encouraging the Flow

The rhythmic contractions of the uterus during orgasm may help the body release the uterine lining when menstruation is already near. Some people find their period arrives soon after, or that the first day's flow comes more easily. This works best as a gentle nudge when the body is already preparing to bleed. It won't bring on a period that isn't ready, and a late period is always worth paying attention to.

Making It a Practice

- **Create a sacred space.** Dim the lights, light a candle, play soft music, and make the room warm and comfortable.
- **Begin with breath.** Take slow, deep breaths into your belly and womb space to settle your nervous system.
- **Start with touch.** Begin with a gentle body or breast massage to awaken sensation and presence before moving toward pleasure.
- **Release the goal.** Orgasm isn't required. The relaxation and connection are healing on their own.
- **Linger afterward.** Rest a hand on your heart and one on your womb, and notice the sensations flowing through you, the Bao Mai in action.

Coming Back to Yourself

Self-pleasure is an act of reclaiming your body as a source of comfort, wisdom, and joy. In a world that often teaches women to disconnect from their bodies, choosing to tend to yourself with pleasure is a powerful return to wholeness.

Exploring the Heart–Uterus connection in Chinese medicine theory

The Bao Mai: The Bridge Between Heart and Womb

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the **Bao Mai**, often translated as the "Uterus Vessel," is the channel that connects the Heart and the Womb. Its name comes from *bao*, meaning the uterus or "the embracing place," and *mai*, meaning vessel or channel.

The Bao Mai is described in the *Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine)*, one of the foundational texts of Chinese medicine. The classic teaches that the Bao Mai belongs to the Heart and connects down into the uterus.

The Heart Leads the Blood

In TCM, the Heart governs the blood and houses the **Shen**, our spirit, consciousness, and emotional life. Through the Bao Mai, the Heart sends blood and Qi downward to the womb, allowing the uterus to fill and the menses to flow.

This is why emotions and the menstrual cycle are so closely linked in Chinese medicine. Grief, anxiety, shock, or a heart that is closed or overburdened can disturb the flow down the Bao Mai, showing up as irregular cycles, missed periods, or emotional heaviness before menstruation. Likewise, a calm, open heart supports a smooth, easeful cycle.

The Figure Eight

Many modern practitioners and teachers describe the Bao Mai as moving in a **figure eight**, flowing between the heart space and the womb space and crossing at the center of the body. While this image comes from contemporary energetic teaching rather than the classical texts, it beautifully expresses the relationship the classics describe: a continuous loop of exchange.

The upper loop holds the heart: love, emotion, and spirit. The lower loop holds the womb: creativity, fertility, and the body's deep cyclical wisdom. Energy rises and descends between

them, with each nourishing the other. What we feel in our hearts is felt in our wombs, and what we hold in our wombs echoes in our hearts.

Tending the Bao Mai

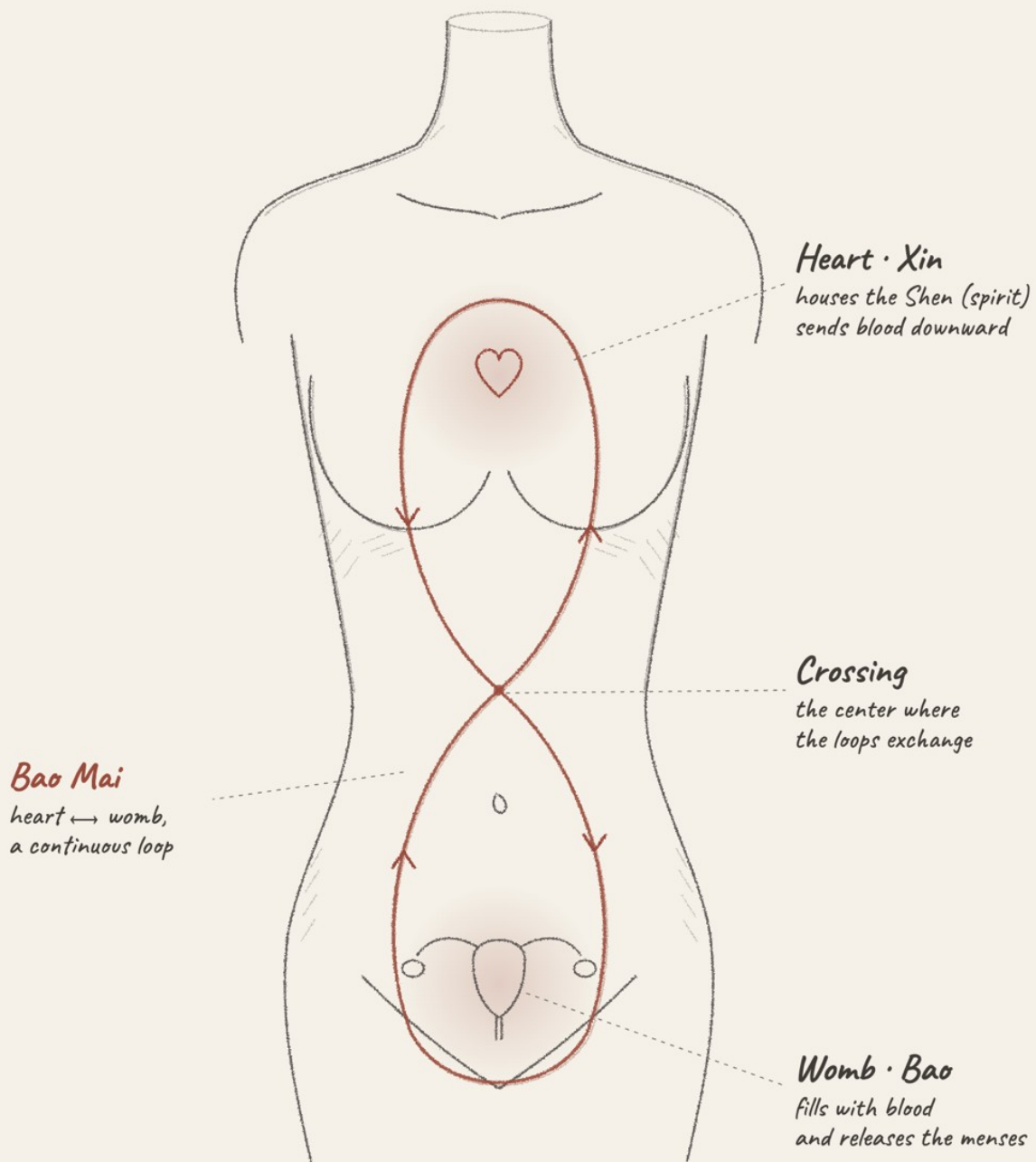
- **Heart-womb breathing:** Place one hand on your heart and one on your lower belly. Breathe slowly, imagining energy flowing down from your heart to your womb on the exhale and rising back up on the inhale.
- **Trace the figure eight:** With your hands or your awareness, gently trace a figure eight between your chest and lower belly to connect the two spaces.
- **Tend your emotions:** Make room to feel and release grief, stress, and worry rather than storing them in the body.
- **Rest during menstruation,** when the Heart's blood is flowing downward and the body is most open.
- **Practice warmth and gentleness** with yourself, through warm baths, heat on the belly, and self-massage.

The Wisdom of the Connection

The Bao Mai reminds us that the womb is not separate from the heart. Our cycles are shaped by how we love, how we feel, and how we care for ourselves. When the path between heart and womb is open, blood and spirit can move freely, and we return to a sense of wholeness.

Bao Mai 胞脈

The Uterus Vessel · the bridge between heart and womb



The Heart's blood and spirit descend to the womb, and the womb's rhythm echoes back to the heart. The figure eight is a modern energetic image of this classical connection.

Yoni Steaming

What It Is

Yoni steaming, also called vaginal steaming, is a practice of sitting over a bowl of warm, herb-infused water so the steam reaches the vulva. "Yoni" is a Sanskrit word meaning womb or vulva, "source", and "origin".

Versions of the practice appear in traditional cultures around the world. These include the *bajos* of Central America and Mexico, *chai-yok* in Korea, and postpartum steaming in parts of Africa and Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia. In many of these traditions, it was used especially after birth, to warm the womb and support recovery, and at the close of menstruation.

How It's Performed

1. **Prepare the herbs.** Place a handful of dried herbs (organic), about $\frac{1}{4}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, in a pot of water. Common herbs include mugwort, rosemary, calendula, rose, lavender, chamomile, motherwort, and yarrow.
2. **Simmer.** Bring to a boil, then simmer covered for about 10–15 minutes.
3. **Let it cool.** Pour into a bowl and allow it to cool until the steam feels comfortably warm, never hot. Test it with your inner wrist or hand over the steam.
4. **Set up.** Place the bowl in a steaming stool, a chair with an open seat, or a toilet with the seat up, or kneel or squat over it on the floor.
5. **Undress from the waist down** and wrap a blanket or towel around your waist and legs to hold in the steam and warmth.
6. **Sit for 10–30 minutes**, breathing slowly. Many women use this time for rest, meditation, journaling, or intention-setting.
7. **Rest afterward.** Stay warm and avoid cold exposure for a little while.

Note: Practitioners often recommend steaming a few days before or after menstruation, not during bleeding. With this in mind, please follow your intuition.

Herbs must be organic as herbs are the most heavily sprayed plants of pesticide use. Also, the pot to steam in can be either stainless steel, glass or ceramic (no aluminum).

Proclaimed Benefits

Practitioners and traditions describe yoni steaming as helping to:

- Warm and relax the womb and pelvis.

- Ease menstrual cramps and pelvic tension.
- Encourage a fuller, cleaner release of menstrual blood, including reducing dark or clotted blood at the start or end of a period.
- Regulate irregular cycles.
- Support postpartum healing and recovery.
- Support fertility.
- Relieve stress and promote deep relaxation.
- Create space for emotional release and a ritual connection with the womb.

In TCM terms, this is often framed as warming "cold in the uterus" and encouraging blood flow, which links to the Bao Mai and the womb's need for warmth.

For Safety Considerations

- **Avoid during pregnancy**, since some herbs (such as mugwort) can stimulate the uterus.
- **Avoid during menstruation**, heavy bleeding, or with active infections, open wounds, or sores.
- **Wait for medical clearance postpartum**, especially after a cesarean, stitches, or tearing.
- **Skip essential oils** in the water, as they can irritate the delicate tissue.
- **Watch for irritation**. Some women are sensitive to certain herbs.
- **Don't use it in place of care** for unusual discharge, odor, pain, or bleeding.

Yoni Steam Ritual: A Step-by-Step Guide

1. Choose your timing

Steam in the days just before or just after your bleed, never during menstruation or pregnancy. Set aside about an hour so nothing feels rushed.

2. Prepare your space

Make the room warm and quiet. Dim the lights, light a candle, and play soft music if you like. Lay out a blanket, a cup of warm tea, and your journal.

3. Brew your herbs with intention

Place a handful of dried herbs in a pot of water, such as mugwort, rose, calendula, and lavender. As the water comes to a simmer, hold your hands over the pot and set an intention for your steam: what you wish to release, or what you wish to call in. Simmer covered for 10–15 minutes.

4. Let it cool to a gentle warmth

Pour the herbal water into your bowl and let it rest. Test the steam with your hand or inner wrist. It should feel soft and comfortably warm, like a warm breath, never hot.

5. Settle in

Undress from the waist down and sit or kneel over the bowl. Wrap the blanket around your waist and legs, letting it fall to the floor to hold in the warmth, like a tent.

6. Breathe into your womb

Place one hand on your heart and one on your lower belly. Breathe slowly, imagining the warmth rising up into your pelvis and womb, softening and relaxing everything it touches. If the steam ever feels too warm, like a prickly feeling, just lift up or add a little space or room temperature water.

7. Rest in stillness (10–20 minutes)

Stay with your breath, meditate, or simply rest. You may wish to speak to your womb, offer gratitude to your body, or let any emotions rise and move through.

8. Close the ritual

Pat your vulva dry. Add a body oil to your vulva for added juiciness. Thank your body and the plant allies. Take a few minutes to journal anything that came up: sensations, feelings, or insights.

9. Stay warm

Put on cozy clothing and socks, sip your tea, and rest. Avoid cold air, cold drinks, or rushing back into activity. Let the warmth stay with you.

10. Return the herbs to the Earth

When the water is cool, offer the herbs and water back to the earth, by pouring them into your garden or at the base of a tree, as a final act of gratitude and release of what no longer serves you.

Before you begin: Avoid steaming if you are pregnant, bleeding, have an infection or open sore, or are recovering from birth without your provider's clearance. Skip essential oils, and stop if you feel any discomfort or irritation.

The Deeper Gifts of Yoni Steaming

Calming the Nervous System

Yoni steaming invites the body into a state of deep rest. The gentle warmth, the slow breath, the stillness, and the soft, earthy scent of the herbs all signal safety to the body. In this state, the parasympathetic nervous system, our "rest and digest" mode, can take the lead. The heart rate slows, the breath deepens, the muscles of the belly and pelvic floor begin to soften, and the mind quiets.

Many of us carry tension in the pelvis without realizing it, holding stress, emotion, and old experiences in the muscles of the womb space. Warmth helps these muscles release. As the pelvis softens, the whole body often follows, letting go of a holding it may have carried for a long time.

A Loving Practice for the Yoni & Womb

In a world that often teaches women to treat this part of the body with shame, silence, or neglect, yoni steaming offers something different: tenderness. It's a practice of giving warmth, attention, and care to a part of ourselves that is rarely tended to with love.

Simply choosing to sit with your womb, to warm it, breathe into it, and speak to it with kindness, is a profound act of self-care. Over time, this practice can transform the way you relate to your body, from distance or discomfort to familiarity and respect.

Support After Sexual or Medical Trauma

For women who have experienced sexual trauma, difficult births, pregnancy loss, invasive medical procedures, or painful exams, the pelvis can become a place the mind would rather avoid. Sensation may feel numb, guarded, or overwhelming.

Yoni steaming offers a gentle, loving way to begin reconnecting. Warmth and stillness help the body slowly learn that this space can be a place of comfort and care again.

It's also natural for emotions to arise during a steam: tears, grief, anger, or relief. These are welcome. Let them move through you, and be gentle with yourself afterward.

A gentle note: If you're healing from trauma, go slowly. Begin with shorter steams, keep your clothes partly on if that feels safer, and stop anytime you feel overwhelmed. Yoni steaming can be a beautiful companion to healing, alongside the support of a trauma-informed therapist or practitioner, rather than a replacement for it.

Deepening the Relationship With Our Feminine Bodies

At its heart, yoni steaming is a practice of relationship. Each time we steam, we turn toward our bodies with presence and curiosity instead of rushing past them. We notice sensation. We listen. We honor the cycles, the seasons, and the stories held in our wombs.

This is body literacy in action: learning the language of our own bodies through attention and care. Over time, the womb becomes less of a mystery and more of a home, a place of wisdom, creativity, and power that we know and trust.

Dance as Medicine

Dance is one of the oldest healing practices we have.

Before humans walk, we dance.

Women have long danced around fires, at births, at weddings, at funerals. Women danced to celebrate, to grieve, to pray, to remember who they were.

Dance was never meant to be a performance.
It was meant to be a homecoming.

Moving the Hips, Awakening the Root

So many of us hold our lives in our hips & pelvis - our stress, our grief, our unspoken stories. The things we were taught to shove down & keep still.

When we move our hips, we wake up our root & sacral centers, the home of our safety, our creativity, our sensuality, & our life force.

The circling, swaying, rocking, spiralling – we become energy in motion, for emotions and movement to flow.

These movements bring warmth & blood flow to the womb space. They soften the muscles that have been holding on for far too long. And they remind the body that this part of us is meant to be alive, not hidden.

A Flood of Feel-Good Medicine

When we dance, our bodies release a beautiful wave of natural chemistry.

Endorphins, which ease pain & lift us up.

Dopamine & serotonin, which brighten our mood.

Oxytocin, especially when we dance with others, which helps us feel connected, safe, & held.

And as these rise, cortisol, our stress hormone, begins to fall.

This is how dance calms the nervous system & supports a healthier environment for our hormones to find their balance, all through the cycle.

Releasing Grief, Expanding Joy

Grief lives in the body.

And so does joy.

When we dance, what has been frozen begins to thaw. Tears may come, laughter may come. Sometimes both, in the very same song. Let them flow and move through you.

Movement gives emotion somewhere to go. It lets what is heavy move through us & out of us, making room for joy to expand where grief once sat.

It's Not About Looking Good

This is not about the right steps. It's not about how we look. It's not about being seen.

It's about FEELING.

Feeling our hips, our breath. our heartbeat. our skin. our sweat. Feeling our bodies, this animal body & the essence that lives within it.

Close your eyes if you need to. Let your body lead. There is no wrong way to move when you are listening to yourself.

A Simple Practice

Choose a song that moves you. Stand with your feet hip-width apart & your knees soft. Place your hands on your lower belly & begin to circle your hips, slowly at first. Let the movement grow. Let it travel up your spine, into your arms, your shoulders, your heart. Follow what feels good. When the song ends, stand still with one hand on your heart & one on your womb, & notice what you feel.

Do this daily, or whenever your body is asking.

Dance is a way of remembering that our bodies are temples to inhabit

The Vagus Nerve: The Wandering Pathway Between Brain, Heart & Womb

What It Is

The vagus nerve is the tenth cranial nerve and the longest nerve running from the brain into the body. Its name comes from the Latin *vagus*, meaning "wandering," because it travels so far, branching through the throat, heart, lungs, and digestive organs, with sensory connections that reach as deep as the cervix and uterus.

It's the main nerve of the **parasympathetic nervous system**, our "rest, digest, and restore" state. When the vagus nerve is active, the heart slows, the breath deepens, digestion flows, inflammation calms, and the body feels safe enough to heal.

There are actually two vagus nerves, one on each side of the body, though we usually speak of them as one.

The Journey: From Brain to Womb

1. The brainstem

The vagus nerve begins in the **medulla oblongata**, the lowest part of the brainstem, where the body's most essential automatic functions are regulated: heartbeat, breathing, and swallowing. A key center here, the **nucleus of the solitary tract**, receives all the messages the vagus nerve carries up from the body.

2. The ear

As it exits the skull, the vagus nerve sends a small branch to the skin of the outer ear. This is the only place the vagus reaches the surface of the skin, which is why gentle ear massage is sometimes used to stimulate it.

3. The throat & voice

Branches reach the **pharynx** (throat) and **larynx** (voice box). The vagus nerve controls swallowing, the gag reflex, and the muscles of the vocal cords. This is why humming, singing, chanting, and even the tone of our voice are connected to vagal activity, and why the voice tightens or softens with how safe we feel.

4. The neck

The vagus nerve travels down the neck inside the **carotid sheath**, alongside the carotid artery and jugular vein. Here it receives information about blood pressure and oxygen levels.

5. The heart

Branches of the vagus nerve form part of the **cardiac plexus** and connect directly to the **sinoatrial (SA) node**, the heart's natural pacemaker. Left alone, the heart would beat around 100 times per minute. The vagus nerve acts as a "**vagal brake**," gently slowing the heart to a calmer resting rhythm. When we're stressed, this brake lifts; when we feel safe, it settles back in. This is the physical bridge between the heart and our sense of calm.

6. The lungs

Vagal branches reach the **bronchi and lungs**, regulating airway tone and sensing how the lungs stretch with each breath. This is a big part of why slow breathing calms the whole body: each long exhale strengthens the vagal brake on the heart.

7. Through the diaphragm

The vagus nerve wraps around the esophagus and passes through the **diaphragm**, our main breathing muscle, into the abdomen.

8. The digestive organs

In the belly, it branches to the **stomach, liver, gallbladder, pancreas, spleen, small intestine, and the first half of the large intestine**. It stimulates digestion, the release of digestive enzymes, and the gentle waves of movement through the gut. This is the core of the **gut-brain connection**.

9. The womb

Classical anatomy taught that the pelvic organs were served only by the spinal nerves. But research led by neuroscientist **Barry Komisaruk and Beverly Whipple** found that women with complete spinal cord injuries could still feel stimulation of the cervix, and even experience orgasm. Brain imaging showed these signals arriving in the brainstem, at the vagus nerve's center. Animal research also traces vagal fibers to the **uterus, cervix, and ovaries**.

This means the vagus nerve offers a **direct pathway from the womb to the brain, bypassing the spinal cord**. It helps explain why sensations of the cervix and uterus can be felt so deeply, why uterine contractions in birth and orgasm affect the whole body, and why pelvic touch and pain can stir such strong emotional responses.

And Back Up to the Brain

About **80% of the vagus nerve's fibers carry information upward**, from the body to the brain. Only about 20% carry instructions down. In other words, the vagus nerve is mostly a *listening* nerve.

The brain is constantly receiving messages from the heart, lungs, gut, and womb: Is the heartbeat steady? Is the breath slow? Is digestion at ease? Is the womb relaxed or

contracting? Based on these signals, the brain decides whether we're safe or under threat, and it shapes our mood, emotions, and stress response accordingly.

This is why **the body can calm the mind**. When we slow our breath, soften the belly, or warm the womb, these messages travel upward along the vagus nerve and tell the brain: *We are safe. We can rest.*

Vagal Tone

"Vagal tone" describes how active and responsive the vagus nerve is. It's commonly measured through **heart rate variability (HRV)**, the natural variation in time between heartbeats. Higher HRV usually reflects a flexible nervous system that can respond to stress and then return to calm.

Higher vagal tone is associated with:

- Better emotional regulation and resilience to stress
- Lower inflammation
- Healthier digestion
- A calmer resting heart rate and healthier blood pressure
- Better sleep
- Stronger social connection and a greater capacity for closeness

Lower vagal tone is associated with chronic stress, anxiety, depression, inflammation, and digestive troubles.

You may also hear about **Polyvagal Theory**, developed by Stephen Porges, which describes how the nervous system shifts between states of safety, fight-or-flight, and shutdown. It's widely used in trauma-informed care and offers a helpful language for these states, though some of its details are still debated among scientists.

Ways to Tone the Vagus Nerve

Strongest evidence

- **Slow breathing with a long exhale.** Breathing about 5–6 breaths per minute (for example, in for 4 counts, out for 6–8) is one of the most reliable ways to increase vagal activity and HRV. The exhale is where the vagal brake engages.
- **Regular movement.** Aerobic exercise, walking, and yoga improve vagal tone over time.
- **Cold on the face.** Splashing cold water on the face or holding a cool cloth to the cheeks and forehead triggers the "diving reflex," which slows the heart through the vagus nerve.

- **Meditation and loving-kindness practice.** Studies by Barbara Fredrickson found that loving-kindness meditation and feelings of social connection were linked to improved vagal tone.

Supportive practices

- **Humming, singing, chanting, and toning,** which engage the vocal cords and throat muscles the vagus nerve controls, and naturally lengthen the exhale.
- **Gargling** with water.
- **Massage and gentle touch,** including neck, ear, and abdominal massage.
- **Laughter and safe social connection,** such as eye contact, warm voices, hugs, and time with people who feel safe.
- **Warmth on the belly and womb,** including yoni steaming, heat packs, and warm baths, which invite the pelvis and belly to soften.
- **Pleasure and orgasm,** which engage the vagal pathways of the womb and are followed by deep relaxation.
- **Gut health,** through fiber-rich foods and fermented foods, since gut bacteria communicate with the brain partly through the vagus nerve.
- **Restful sleep** and time in nature.

How This Benefits Us

When we tend to the vagus nerve, we strengthen the body's ability to return to safety after stress. Over time, this may bring:

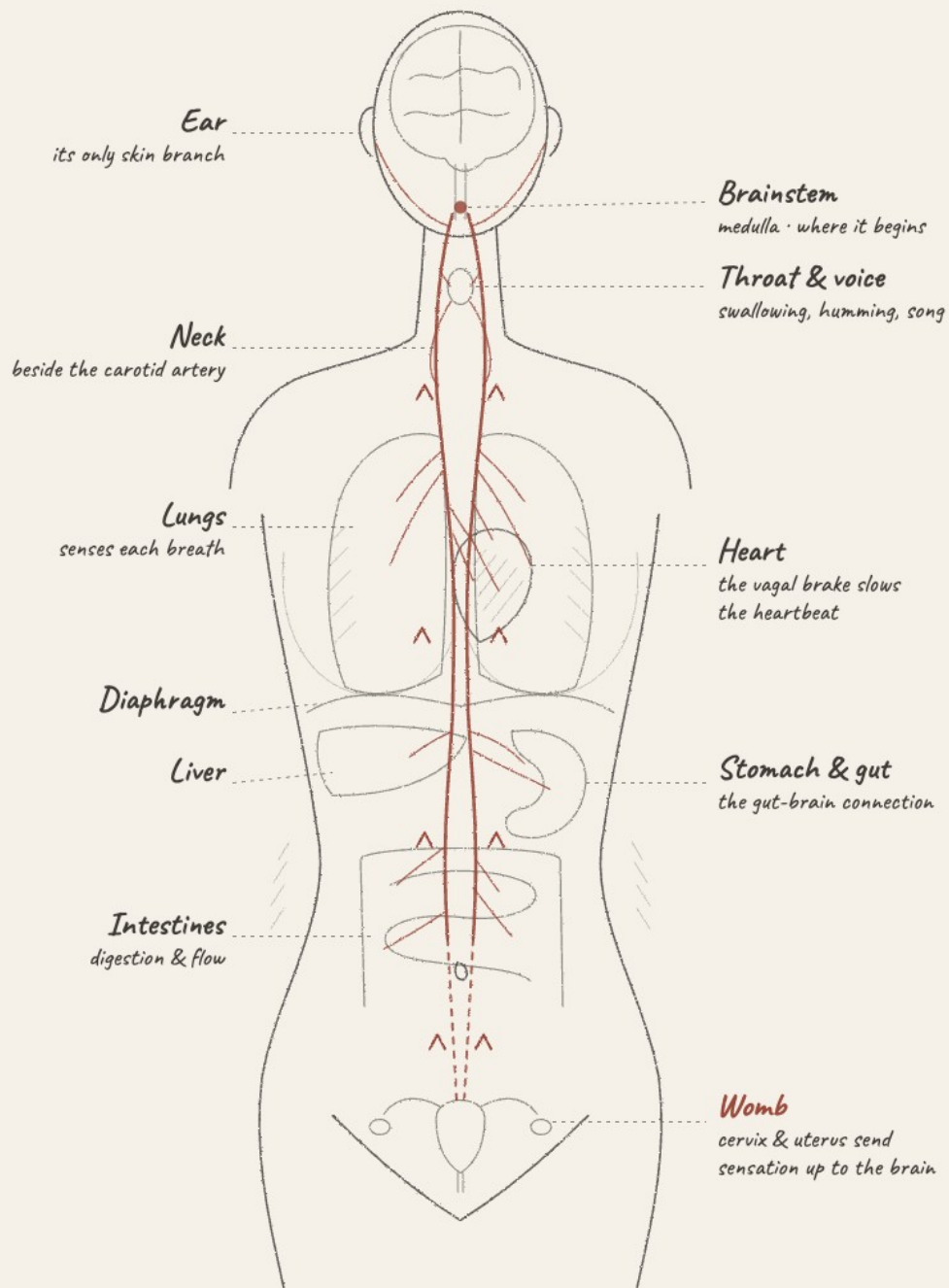
- A calmer, steadier heart and breath
- More ease in digestion and less bloating or tension in the belly
- Softer premenstrual symptoms, as stress has less of a hold on the cycle
- Greater emotional balance, patience, and resilience
- Deeper rest and better sleep
- More capacity for intimacy, pleasure, and connection
- A felt sense of being at home in the body

The Wisdom of the Wandering Nerve

The vagus nerve weaves together the brain, the voice, the heart, the breath, the belly, and the womb into one conversation. In many ways, it echoes the teaching of the Bao Mai: that the heart and womb are not separate, and that what we feel in one, we feel in the other. When we breathe slowly, sing, rest, and tend to our bodies with love, we are speaking directly to this pathway, and the body listens.

The Vagus Nerve

The wandering nerve · brain, heart, belly & womb



— vagus nerve - - - sensory fibers, womb to brain ^ about 80% of messages travel upward

Mostly a listening nerve, the vagus carries news of the heart, breath, belly and womb up to the brain, telling it whether we are safe to rest.

Returning Our Blood to the Earth

"When women return their blood back to the earth, the men shall return home from war, and the world will know peace."

— A saying often shared as a Hopi prophecy

For most of modern history, menstrual blood has been treated as waste: something to hide, flush, and throw away. But across many traditions, a woman's blood was seen as sacred, life-giving, and deeply connected to the earth's own cycles of renewal.

Returning our blood to the earth is a simple, ancient act of reverence. Each month, the womb builds a rich, nourishing lining, ready to hold new life. When we offer that blood back to the soil, we complete a circle. What was created in our bodies returns to the body of the earth, the original Mother.

Menstrual blood is also naturally rich in iron, nitrogen, and other nutrients, which is why many women offer it to their gardens, houseplants, or trees as nourishment.

This ritual is about relationship. It invites us to honor our cycles instead of hiding them, to remember that we are part of nature rather than separate from it, and to turn a monthly bleed into a monthly prayer. When women reclaim this sacred connection, we begin to heal the separation between ourselves, our bodies, & the earth. As we give our blood back to the earth, it seeps into the soil, reaching the roots and the mycelial networks, the vast web of life beneath our feet. And in that offering of our life-giving blood, we offer a sacred prayer for peace.

How to Return Your Blood

- **Collect it** using a menstrual cup, disc, or reusable cloth pads soaked in a bowl of water.
- **Dilute it** with water. Many women use about one part blood to several parts water.
- **Offer it** to the base of a tree, your garden, or a potted plant, pouring it onto the soil rather than the leaves.
- **Set an intention** as you pour: a prayer, a word of gratitude, or something you're ready to release.

NORAH Tea – A Uterine Superfood

A Nourishing Tea for Menstruation & Uterine Health

NORAH tea is an herbal tea that consists of Nettles, Oatstraw, Red Raspberry Leaf, Alfalfa, and Rose Hips. It has many healthful benefits and preventative properties. The herbs in NORAH tea are specifically chosen because their nutritive content and herbal actions are so beneficial to women. It is jam packed with vitamins & minerals. NORAH tea is beneficial for women with any sort of reproductive issue from painful periods, endometriosis, PCOS, pregnancy, postpartum & breastfeeding and just overall uterine health.

NORAH tea stimulates your system to optimal health, optimizes mineral absorption, guards against anemias and maximizes the health of the liver. It promotes proper contractibility of the uterus supporting our menstruation as well as childbirth and postpartum.

NORAH Tea consists of five ingredients: **Nettles, Oat Straw, Raspberry Leaf, Alfalfa, & Rose Hips.**

Mix 2 parts (8 oz.) Raspberry Leaf and Nettles to 1 part (4 oz.) Alfalfa and Oat Straw. Mix well and place in a ziplock bag. You can also add Peppermint, Spearmint, Lemon Balm, or Rose Hips (a sour taste) for flavor and additional health benefits, if desired.

To Prepare: Experiment with the amount you use, depending on the water used and tea used. I make a large pot of tea at a time, as I purchase 1 lb. bags of each tea leaf. I bring a large pot of water to a boil, then turn off the heat. I put a handful of each tea leaf in the pot and stir around so no tea leaf is not submerged in the water for infusion. Cover the pot with a lid for many hours (for at least 4 hours to as long as overnight) Strain using a small mesh strainer into a large pitcher, or multiple pitchers and your “tea” (technically an infusion, a concentrated tea) is now ready. Since this is a highly nutritious drink it is also strongly flavored. These suggestions are offered to help you maximize the amount you do drink. Feel free to experiment, so that you are sure to drink it frequently. Some women like to make a gallon or more at a time and store it in the fridge. This way they can make it 1-2 times in a week. This is easier for some women and they end up drinking the recommended amount.

To Use: Add Honey to taste, if desired. Cut half and half with water if you made it too strong.

Nettles: *Urtica Dioica*

Active Ingredients: Histamine, Tannin, Saponins, Acetylcholine Formic Acid, Sterols, Chlorophyll, Glucoquinine, Serotonin, Iron, & Vitamin A, C, D and K in an easily absorbable form, very high in minerals, including silicon.

Actions: Astringent, diuretic, nutritive, detoxifier, galactagogue, decongestant, hypoglycemic & tonic.

Astringent means it reduces discharges. Galactagogue means it supports the production of breast milk.

Nettles is one of the most widely applicable plants we have. It strengthens and supports the whole body. Studies are also showing that it has a broad range anti-inflammatory usage. It is an extremely nutritive plant, high in vitamins and minerals, particularly iron, silica and potassium, and is showing broad antifungal effects as well. Through its diuretic effect, it promotes detoxification and works to prevent bladder infections. It also strengthens the kidneys and adrenals, an important function during pregnancy with their increased work load. The readily assimilated high calcium content helps to diminish muscle pain in all areas of the body during pregnancy including the legs, round ligaments, cervix, back and also during menstruation as well. With its high Vitamin K content, it also is proactive in strengthening the blood vessels and maintains arterial elasticity.

Oatstraw: *Avena Sativa*

Active Ingredients: 50% starch, proteins, alkaloids, saponins, flavones, sterols, Vitamin B, silica, & calcium, magnesium, silicon, potassium, & iron.

Actions: Nervine tonic, anti-depressant, nutritive, demulcent, vulnerary.

Oatstraw is one of the best remedies for “feeding” the nervous system. It is useful for exhaustion and depression; it strengthens the whole nervous system, making it a preventative and protective herb to enhance your ability to cope with stress. While being stimulating and energy-giving, they are also relaxing and an aid to sleep. Oats is also a uterine tonic, and works on strengthening the thyroid and balancing hormone production. It is also a soother for the digestive tract. It lowers blood sugar and is useful for fluid retention. It is one of the best sources for magnesium, helping irritability and calcium absorption.

Raspberry Leaf: *Rubus idaeus*

Active Ingredients: pectin, citric acid, malic acid, tannin, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, magnesium, & zinc, Vitamin A, B, C & E. Has the highest known herbal source of manganese.

Actions: Astringent, tonic, toning, pelvic and uterine relaxant.

Raspberry leaves have a long tradition of use in pregnancy and menstruation to strengthen and tone the tissue of the womb, assisting contractions and preventing excessive bleeding. Raspberry also tones the mucous membranes throughout the body; soothe the kidneys and urinary tract, and preventing excessive bleeding after the birth. Raspberry works on the digestive tract, stabilizing it. The tonic and relaxant actions on the smooth muscles of the uterus act to reduce the pain of uterine contractions during childbirth & menstruation

Alfalfa: *Medicago sativa*

Active Ingredients: Vitamin K, iron, chlorophyll, Vitamin A, B-6, E, D, & copper. Actions: bitter, general tonic, diuretic

Alfalfa has a history going back to ancient times, cherished for its nourishing abilities for people and their animals. It is very rich in trace minerals. It purifies the blood, and is a powerful tonic. It balances the blood sugar preventing hypoglycemia common in pregnancy. It soothes the digestive tract, and contains the digestive enzyme betaine, and the saponins balance the intestinal flora.

Rose Hips: *Rosa canina*

Nutritive, one of the best natural sources of Vitamin C we know of. Excellent tonic, aids the gall-bladder, kidneys and bladder. Strengthens connective tissue and helps relieve stress. Rose Hips are a powerful natural antioxidant and nutritional supplement. During pregnancy and the postpartum period, rose hips offer significant benefits, including boosting immunity, supporting collagen production, improving iron absorption, and assisting with tissue repair.

Nutritive, one of the best natural sources of Vitamin C we know of. Excellent tonic, aids the gall-bladder, kidneys and bladder. Strengthens connective tissue and helps relieve stress.

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A Loving Reminder

This guide draws on traditional wellness wisdom and cycle-awareness practices. It is offered as an invitation to listen more closely to your own body — not as medical advice, and not as a replacement for the care of a doctor, midwife, or gynecologist.

Every cycle is different, and yours may not match these patterns exactly — that's normal. If your periods are unusually painful, very heavy, absent, or irregular, or you live with a condition such as PCOS, endometriosis, or a hormonal imbalance, please bring that to a trusted healthcare provider. Your own body's signals are always the most trustworthy source — this guide is simply here to help you hear them more clearly.

May we return to our wholeness. May we reclaim our ancient, wildish nature, and remember that being human means belonging to something larger than ourselves – a connection to our lineage, a connection to Mother Earth, the elements & seasons.

And so it is...

***Love,
Rosa***

About Rosa

My work is rooted in feminine embodiment, feminine rewilding, and helping women come home to their bodies.

As a heart-centered practitioner and facilitator, I am devoted to serving women through the wisdom of the body.

For 24 years, I have worked as a bodywork practitioner and yoga teacher. For the past 11 years, I have also walked alongside women as a birth educator, doula, postpartum care provider, and guide in women's wisdom traditions.

My work is deeply intimate and embodied. My own experiences of birth, postpartum, and motherhood have shaped the way I serve, teaching me that the body speaks, remembers, and carries an innate intelligence of its own.

I guide women toward greater body literacy - into understanding their cycles, sensations, seasons, and the language of their own bodies. Through this work, I invite women to cultivate a deeper relationship with the wisdom they already carry.

To feel. To trust. To return to what is ancient and wild within us.

My deepest intention is to help women remember the power, beauty, and wonder of the body as a living temple.

