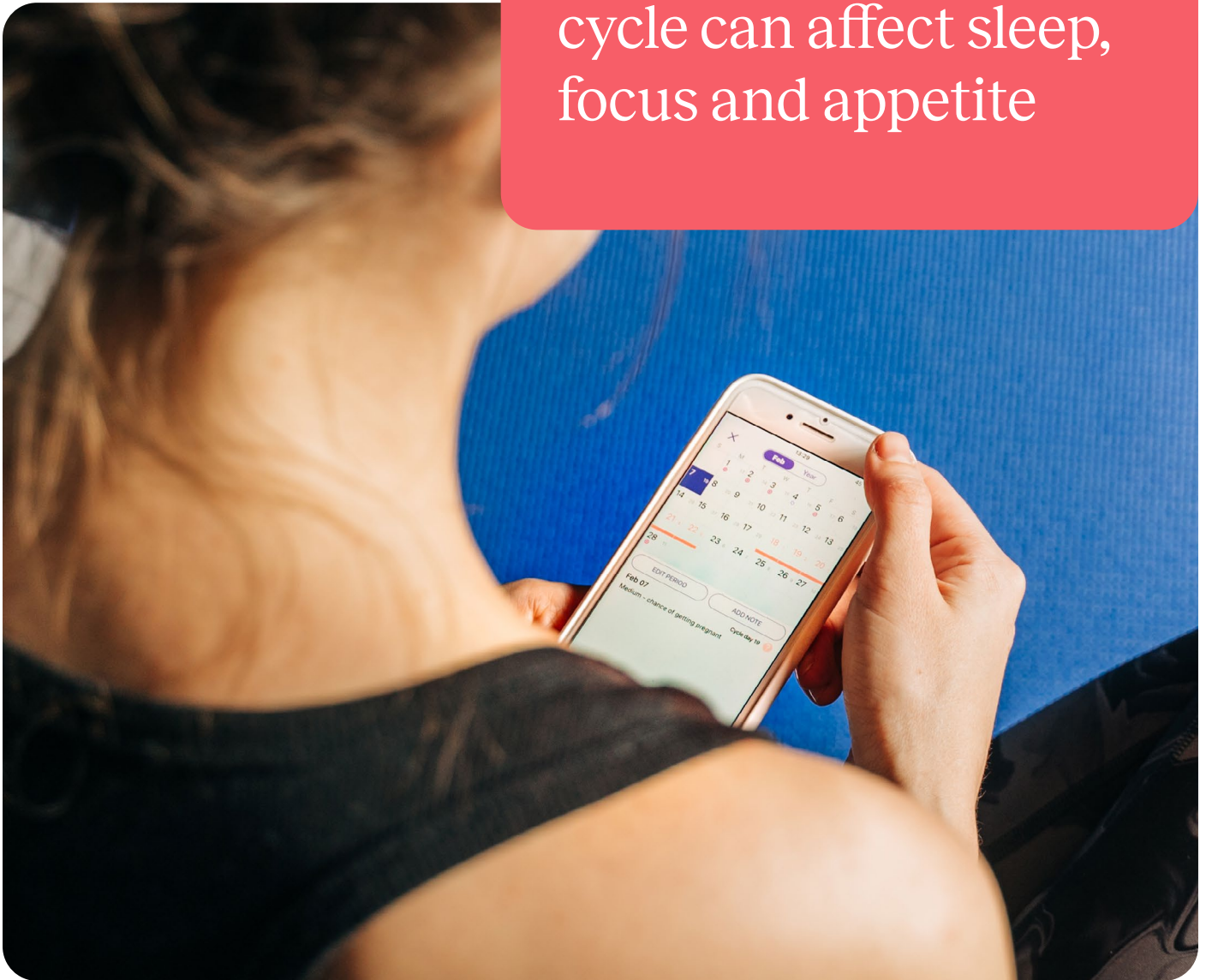


## How your menstrual cycle can affect sleep, focus and appetite



Have you ever experienced weeks where you feel incredibly productive, sleep well, and feel on top of the world? Then suddenly, you struggle to concentrate, toss and turn at night, and find yourself craving every snack in sight? If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. What you're experiencing is **completely normal and has everything to do with your menstrual cycle**.

**Your hormones don't just affect your period** they influence your brain, sleep patterns, appetite, and pretty much every aspect of how you feel day to day. These monthly fluctuations that so many people experience are **your body following a predictable pattern**.

Once you understand what's happening and why, **you can work with your cycle instead of feeling like you're constantly fighting against it**. In this guide, we'll explain exactly what's happening during your cycle and share practical ways to help you feel more in control.

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## Your monthly hormone cycle: What's actually happening

Let's start with the fundamentals. Your menstrual cycle is driven by two main hormones: oestrogen and progesterone. These hormones don't just affect your reproductive system they communicate with your brain, digestive system, and virtually every other part of your body.

**Your cycle follows a predictable four-phase pattern that repeats each month:**

### Phase 1

**Menstruation** (Days 1-5)

**Your period begins** as hormone levels reach their lowest point. You might feel somewhat low in energy but also experience relief as any premenstrual symptoms subside.

### Phase 2

**Follicular Phase** (Days 1-14)

**Oestrogen begins to rise**, and this is often when you start feeling more like yourself again. Energy returns, mood improves, and you might find yourself thinking, *"I can actually tackle that challenging project now."*

### Phase 3

**Ovulation** (Around Day 14)

**Oestrogen reaches its peak** around ovulation. Many people feel particularly energetic and mentally sharp during this time.

### Phase 4

**Luteal Phase** (Days 15-28)

**Progesterone takes centre stage.** This hormone can make you feel naturally sleepier and less energetic, as your body prepares for a potential pregnancy. In the final week, both hormones drop dramatically, which can trigger various symptoms.

## What to watch out for:

- **Energy levels that follow a monthly pattern** (higher mid-cycle, lower before your period)
- **Mood changes** that occur around the same time each month
- **Sleep quality that varies significantly** from week to week
- **Food cravings** that appear at predictable times
- **Days when your thinking feels sharp** versus **times when concentration is difficult**
- Physical symptoms like **bloating or headaches that appear on schedule**

It's important to remember that **everyone's cycle is different**. Some people barely notice these changes, whilst others experience more pronounced fluctuations. Both experiences are completely normal.

## Why your sleep quality changes (and how to improve it)

**Sleep is often where people first notice their cycle's effects.** One week you sleep soundly, the next you're lying awake wondering because your mind has chosen 3 AM to replay every worry you've ever had.

**Here's what's happening:** after ovulation, your body produces significantly more progesterone. This hormone has a dual effect. **It can make you feel naturally drowsy during the day**, but it also raises your core body temperature by approximately half a degree. This seemingly small increase can make achieving deep, restorative sleep more challenging.

In the week before your period, both **oestrogen and progesterone levels drop sharply**. This hormonal decline can result in frequent night wakings, lighter sleep, or vivid dreams that leave you feeling unrested.

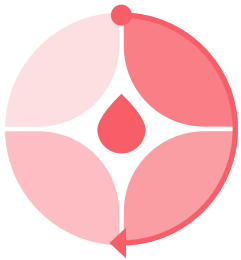
If you have ADHD, **sleep disruption during this time can significantly worsen your usual symptoms**, making concentration and emotional regulation even more challenging.

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair lying in bed, resting her head on a light-colored pillow. She is wearing a light pink, ribbed long-sleeved shirt. Her eyes are closed, and she appears to be sleeping peacefully.

### Signs your cycle is affecting your sleep:

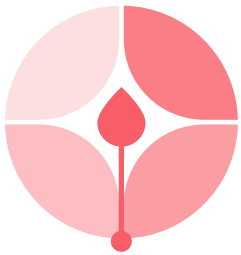
- **Difficulty falling asleep** in the week before your period
- **Frequent night wakings**, especially during the second half of your cycle
- **Feeling tired** despite getting adequate sleep
- **Night sweats** or feeling too warm around ovulation
- **Increased sleep needs** during menstruation
- **Particularly vivid or disturbing dreams** before your period
- **Daytime fatigue** that follows a monthly pattern

## Evidence-based sleep strategies:



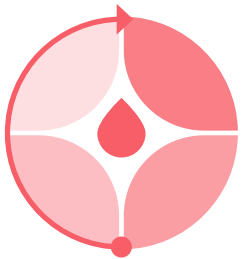
### First half of your cycle (days 1-14):

This is typically your optimal sleep period, so take advantage of it. If you've been meaning to try better sleep habits, this is an ideal time to put them into practise.



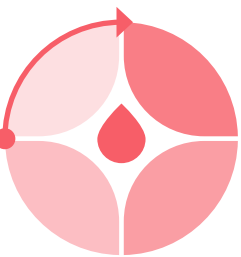
### Around ovulation (day 14):

You might find you need slightly less sleep during this phase, but maintaining consistent bedtime routines remains important for overall sleep health.



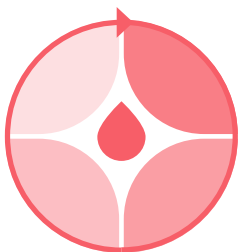
### Second half of your cycle (days 15-28):

Focus on optimising your sleep environment. Keep your bedroom cooler than usual. Consider opening windows, using fans, or switching to lighter bedding to counteract your slightly elevated body temperature.



### The week before your period:

Be particularly protective of your sleep routine during this phase. Avoid caffeine after early afternoon, limit screen time before bed, and consider relaxation techniques like gentle stretching or meditation.



### Throughout your cycle:

Try and stick to a sleep schedule, even on weekends. Try tracking your sleep patterns alongside your cycle to identify personal trends and effective strategies.

If sleep problems are severe or persist throughout your entire cycle, speak to a healthcare professional, as other factors beyond hormones might be involved.



## Understanding cyclical changes in focus and mental clarity

Some weeks your brain feels like a high-performance computer, whilst other weeks it's more like trying to stream video on a slow internet connection. If you have ADHD, you're likely familiar with this experience, and **your menstrual cycle can make these fluctuations even more pronounced.**

During the first half of your cycle, **rising oestrogen levels often enhance cognitive function.** This hormone supports memory, improves task-switching abilities, and generally increases mental agility. **Around ovulation,** when oestrogen peaks, **many people report feeling most productive and mentally sharp.**

However, during the second half of your cycle, **progesterone can create a different mental state.** While this hormone has calming effects, **it can also make thinking feel slower and less precise.** Combined with the hormonal decline before your period, it's understandable why **you might feel like your mental clarity has temporarily diminished.**

**For people with ADHD, these changes can be particularly noticeable.** Executive function challenges, such as organisation, time management, and emotional regulation, may feel more difficult during certain cycle phases.



### Recognising cognitive pattern changes:

- **Feeling exceptionally sharp and productive** around mid-cycle
- **Struggling with concentration** or decision-making before your period
- **Finding complex tasks more challenging** during the second half of your cycle
- Experiencing **enhanced problem-solving abilities** around ovulation
- **Feeling easily distracted or overwhelmed** in premenstrual days
- **Noticing memory lapses** at specific times of the month
- **Increased emotional sensitivity** that affects clear thinking

## Strategies for working with your mental rhythms:

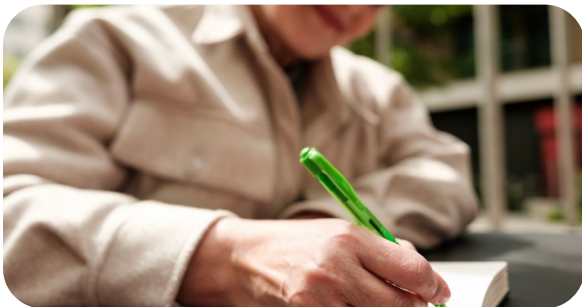


### Embrace your high-performance times:

When possible, schedule demanding work, important presentations, or complex problem-solving tasks **for the first half of your cycle** when cognitive function typically peaks.

### Adjust expectations during slower phases:

During the second half of your cycle, be realistic about your capabilities. This period is well-suited for **routine tasks, administrative work, or creative projects that don't require intense focus.**



### Use external support systems:

When your internal mental resources feel limited, **rely more heavily on external tools.** Create detailed lists, set phone reminders, break large tasks into smaller steps.

### Incorporate movement:

When your mind feels stuck, **physical activity can help reset your mental state.** Even brief walks or light stretching can improve focus and mental clarity.



### Practise self-compassion:

Remember that these cognitive fluctuations are temporary and hormonally driven. You're not becoming less capable; **your brain is simply operating under different chemical conditions.**

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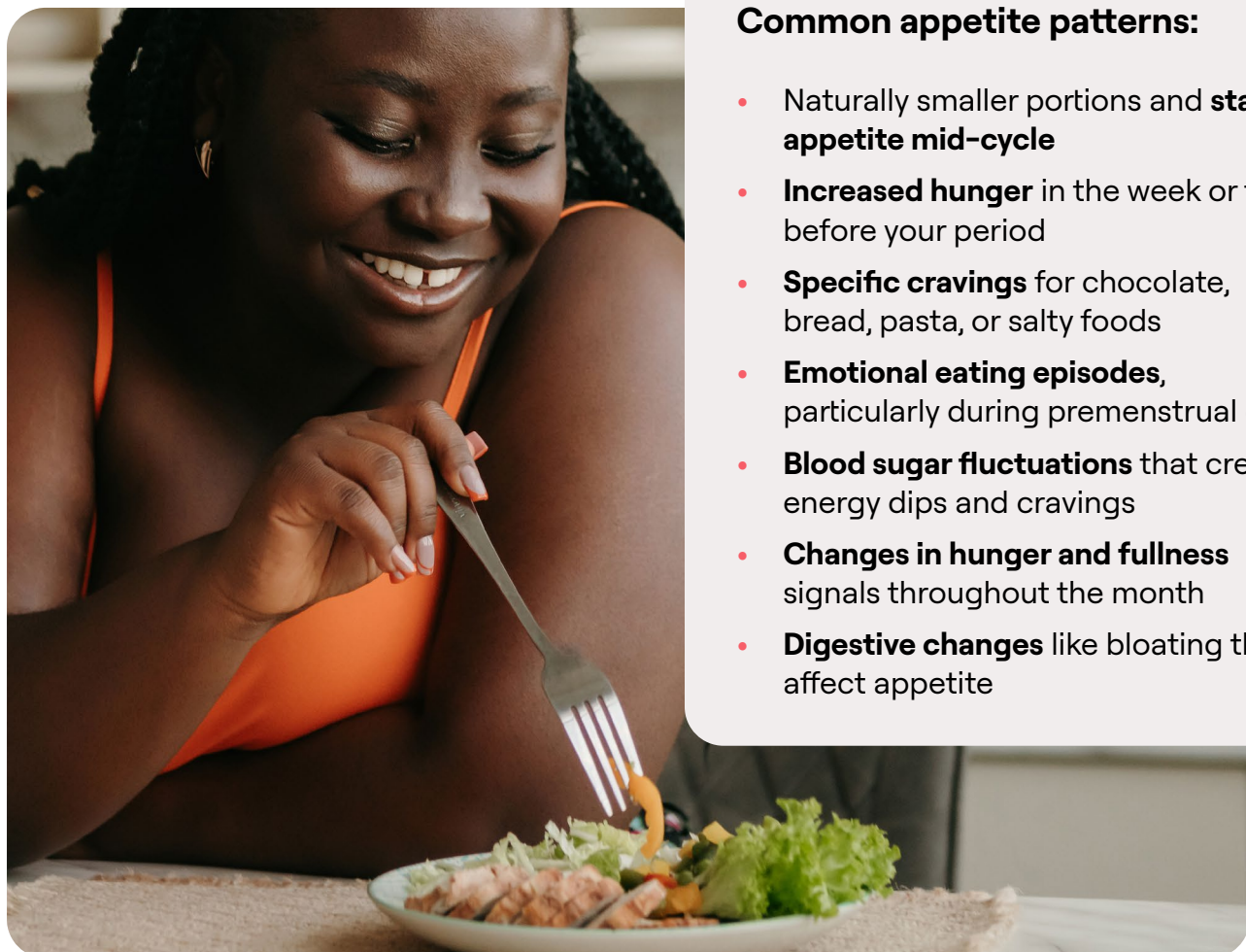
## Understanding appetite and craving patterns

Have you ever found yourself searching the kitchen late at night for chocolate or crisps, then wondered a week later where that intense appetite disappeared to? **These cyclical appetite changes are driven by the same hormonal fluctuations affecting your sleep and mood.**

During the first half of your cycle, **oestrogen acts as a natural appetite regulator**. You might notice feeling satisfied with smaller portions and experiencing fewer cravings. This isn't about being "good" with food – **your hormones are naturally helping to keep things balanced.**

During the second half of your cycle, **progesterone can increase appetite and intensify cravings**, particularly for carbohydrate-rich foods. **This isn't about willpower.** Your body is responding to bodily shifts, including a slightly higher metabolic rate during this phase.

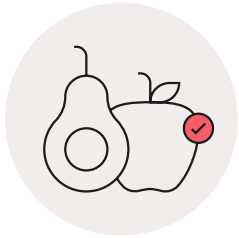
**The week before your period often brings the most intense cravings.** As both hormones decline, your brain's reward pathways become more sensitive, making chocolate and other comfort foods feel irresistibly appealing. Serotonin levels may dip, and **your body instinctively seeks foods that can provide a quick mood boost.**



### Common appetite patterns:

- Naturally smaller portions and **stable appetite mid-cycle**
- **Increased hunger** in the week or two before your period
- **Specific cravings** for chocolate, bread, pasta, or salty foods
- **Emotional eating episodes**, particularly during premenstrual days
- **Blood sugar fluctuations** that create energy dips and cravings
- **Changes in hunger and fullness** signals throughout the month
- **Digestive changes** like bloating that affect appetite

## Nutrition strategies that work:



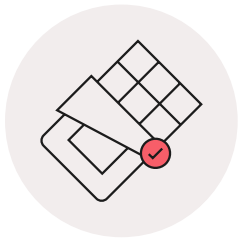
### First half of your cycle:

Take advantage of naturally stable appetite to **practise healthy eating patterns**. This is an excellent time for meal preparation or trying new nutritious recipes, though avoid using this phase to restrict calories unnecessarily.



### Second half of your cycle:

**You may need to eat more during this time.** Focus on meals combining protein, healthy fats, and complex carbohydrates to maintain steady blood sugar and consistent energy levels.



### Managing cravings:

Rather than completely restricting desired foods (which often leads to overeating later), **try an “addition” approach**. If you want chocolate, have some alongside nuts or fruit. Craving crisps? Enjoy them as part of a balanced meal rather than as a replacement.



### Eat regularly:

Skipping meals during the second half of your cycle can intensify cravings later. **Aim to eat something every 3-4 hours** to maintain stable blood sugar and prevent overwhelming hunger.



### Stay hydrated:

Sometimes thirst masquerades as hunger. Keep water readily available and **check if hydration helps before reaching for snacks**.



### Try magnesium-rich foods:

**Foods containing magnesium** (such as dark chocolate, nuts, and leafy greens) may help with both cravings and mood during the premenstrual phase.



## When to seek professional support

Whilst monthly changes in sleep, mood, and appetite are normal, sometimes symptoms become severe enough to significantly impact quality of life. **Understanding when to seek professional help is important for optimal health.**

Some people experience **Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)**, a condition involving severe mood changes that substantially affect relationships, work performance, or daily functioning. If you experience intense depression, anxiety, or thoughts of self-harm in the weeks before your period, **professional support is essential.**

**Thyroid disorders can also amplify cyclical symptoms.** If you're experiencing severe fatigue, significant mood swings, or notable weight changes alongside cycle symptoms, thyroid function testing may be warranted.



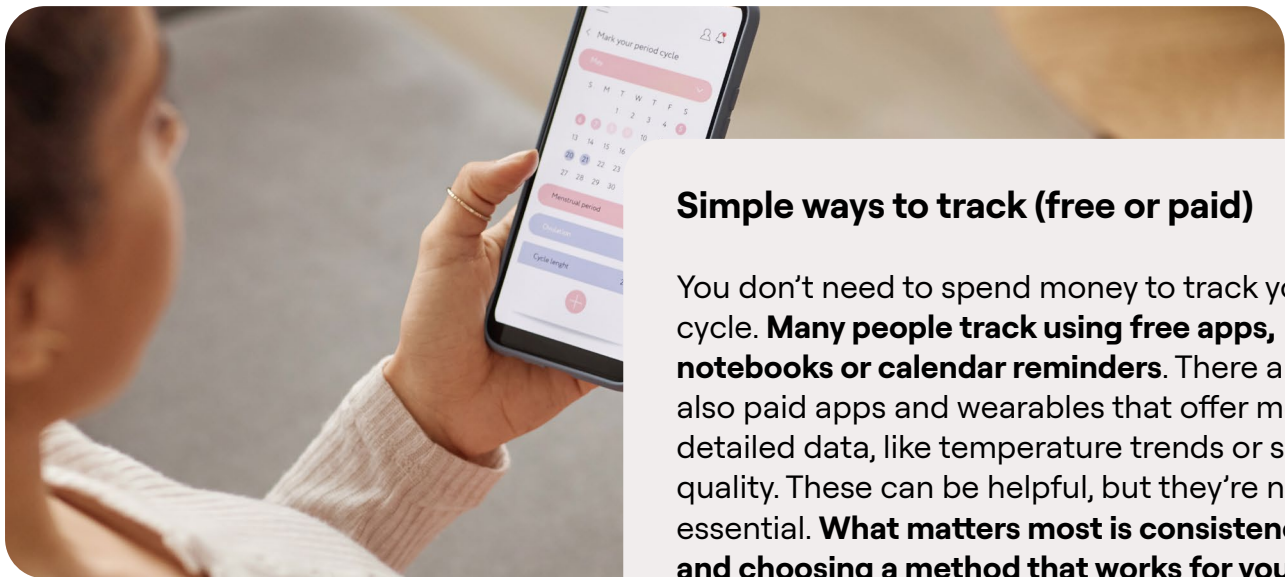
### Signs requiring professional attention:

- **Mood changes** that seriously impact relationships or work performance
- **Physical symptoms** that prevent normal daily activities
- **Sleep disruption** that persists throughout the entire cycle
- **Cognitive symptoms** that significantly impair functioning
- **Eating behaviours** that feel completely uncontrollable or distressing
- **Symptoms that worsen** progressively over time
- **Any thoughts of self-harm** or severe depression

## Creating your personal cycle management plan

To spot meaningful patterns in your cycle, **it's best to track consistently for at least three months**. Some variation is completely normal, especially during times of stress, illness or major life changes.

The goal is to focus on the factors that affect your daily life, rather than getting lost in too much detail. Think of it as **gathering useful information to help you understand and support your body better**.



### Simple ways to track (free or paid)

You don't need to spend money to track your cycle. **Many people track using free apps, notebooks or calendar reminders**. There are also paid apps and wearables that offer more detailed data, like temperature trends or sleep quality. These can be helpful, but they're not essential. **What matters most is consistency and choosing a method that works for you.**

### What to track

- **Energy and mood** – Rate your energy levels and mood each day on a scale from 1 to 10. Make a note of any particularly good or difficult days and see if they line up with certain parts of your cycle.
  - **Sleep quality** – Record your bedtime and wake time, along with how rested you feel in the morning. You can also track things like disturbed sleep, temperature changes or vivid dreams.
  - **Focus and mental clarity** – Note when you feel productive, sharp or easily distracted. Over time, this can help you plan tasks around the times you feel most focused.
  - **Appetite and cravings** – Track your hunger levels, cravings and how satisfied you feel after meals. If you notice emotional eating or big changes in appetite, it's worth writing those down too.
  - **Physical symptoms** – Keep a record of any recurring symptoms, such as bloating, breast tenderness, headaches or skin changes.
  - **External factors** – Life events like stress, travel or changes in your exercise routine can affect your cycle experience. Make a quick note of anything significant.
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## Spotting personal patterns

After a few months, you may notice clear trends. For example, **you might feel more energised around day 12 of your cycle** or find that **your sleep becomes lighter just before your period**. These kinds of insights can help you plan and feel more in tune with your body.

**Pay attention to both the timing and intensity of symptoms.** Some variation is completely normal, but if anything feels severe or starts to interfere with your daily life, it's a good idea to speak to a healthcare professional. Finally, remember that **no cycle is perfectly predictable**. Even with good tracking, your experience might change from month to month and that's okay.

Contact **HealthHero** today for personalised support and expert guidance on your hormonal health journey. We're here to help you thrive throughout every phase of your cycle.