

The Menstrual Cycle

The **menstrual cycle** is the scientific term for the monthly changes that occur in the female reproductive system. It is a necessary part of reproduction in humans.

The menstrual cycle is commonly divided into three phases: the follicular phase, ovulation, and the luteal phase. The days of the menstrual cycle are counted from the first day of menstrual bleeding.

A woman's first menstruation is termed **menarche**. The average age of menarche is about 12.72 in Canada. The end of a woman's reproductive phase is called **menopause**, which commonly occurs somewhere between the ages of 45 and 55.

The length of a woman's menstrual cycle will typically vary, with some shorter cycles and some longer cycles. A woman who experiences variations of less than eight days between her longest cycles and shortest cycles is considered to have regular menstrual cycles.

Phases of the Menstrual Cycle

The menstrual cycle can be divided into three different phase. The average length of each phase is given below.

Phase	Average Start Day	Average End Day
Follicular	1	13
Ovulation	13	16
Luteal	16	28

Follicular Phase

During this phase, the lining of the uterus grows in preparation for a possible pregnancy. At the same time, a single egg inside one of the ovaries begins to mature. By the end of this phase, the egg will reach full maturity.

Ovulation

Once the egg has finished maturing, it is released from the ovary. In the average cycle, this will occur around 13 days after the start of the cycle.

After being released from the ovary, the egg is swept into the fallopian tube. After about a day, if the egg remains unfertilized, it will dissolve.

If the egg is fertilized, it will immediately begin to develop into an embryo. This developing embryo takes about three days to reach the uterus, and another three days to implant into the uterine lining.

Luteal Phase

During this phase, and assuming pregnancy has not occurred, the woman's hormone levels will drop. This drop in hormone levels will, after about two weeks, trigger menstruation and the start of the next cycle.

Menstruation

Menstruation is also called menstrual bleeding, menses, or a period. During this time, the woman sheds the extra tissue that was created in order to thicken the uterine lining during the follicular phase.

Normal menstruation lasts anywhere from 2 to 7 days. The average blood loss during menstruation is 10-80 mL. Because of this blood loss, women are more susceptible to iron deficiency than men.

Painful cramping in the abdomen, back, or upper thighs is common during the first few days of menstruation.