



AMANDA HOWE



know your flow

HAVE A PERFECT PERIOD,
AND LIVE THE LIFE YOU WANT
ANY TIME OF THE MONTH

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as nature intended

KNOW YOUR FLOW

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Dedication

For all women - make the decision to start living the life you imagine...

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Introduction

Do you really appreciate how miraculous you are?

Every woman out there is amazing, beautiful and miraculous.

Do you realise that means you? You are amazing, beautiful and miraculous.

And before you fully recognise this, your first step may be to acknowledge that your body is responsible for a HUGE part of the amazingness, beauty and miracles that make you *you*.

Did you flinch away from these thoughts? I guessed as much. Why is it that we, as women, can't see these qualities in ourselves? How have we reached a point where we exist without self-worth, self-care or self-love?

The most precious thing about young children is that they know that they're amazing, beautiful and special. I asked my four-year-old daughter the other day, "Do you know how beautiful you are?" Her answer was a plain, simple, confident, "Yep!" without even a flinch. Where, along the way, do we lose that self-belief?

It's time for all of us to get back our self-confidence, and remember how amazing, beautiful and miraculous we truly are. Only when we do, will we invest the time and effort it takes to prioritise ourselves.

We need to learn to listen to our bodies again, to get to know them in depth. That, in turn, will help us to rediscover respect for our bodies, self-care, and the important – but sometimes seemingly unattainable – self-love.

As a woman you are so busy with life. You're busy being a wife, a girlfriend, a mother, a daughter, a friend, an employee, a business owner, and probably fulfilling many other roles. And because you're so busy, you've no doubt forgotten to take time to look after yourself.

I believe it's time to put your oxygen mask on first, so you can be at your best to take care of the rest of your life – whatever that may be.

Let's talk menstrual cycles, shall we?

Your menstrual cycle is a core part of what makes you a woman. Let's face it, almost every single one of us either has, or has had, one. Nearly all of us are blessed with a monthly cycle that results in a period. And even if you use a little sarcasm with the whole “blessed” part, it's a huge part of our lives.

Most women will menstruate for 37 to 47 years. That means they'll have between 480 and 610 menstrual cycles in their lifetime, excluding any childbearing and breastfeeding years. These figures assume that girls will begin to menstruate somewhere between ages 8-15; and that their periods will cease when they reach menopause, between ages 45-55.

We know our periods by many names, such as “menstrual cycle”, “the time of the month”, “TOM”, “monthlies”, “monthly visitor”, “moon time”, “code red”, “rags”, “women's troubles”, “the curse”, “shark week”, “Aunt Flo”, “Aunt Dot”, “painters are in”, “Fred”, “little friend”, “red dot”, “big red”, “leak week”, “leaky basement”, “war in Virginia”, “flying the red flag”, “the gift”, “girl time”, and even “Mother Nature's gift”.

GASP! Its almost like I've said every swear word under the sun. And just as swear words are forbidden, anything about our menstrual cycles is almost in that forbidden category too. No matter what we call our periods, we just aren't comfortable with the fact that we bleed every month. Most of us don't talk about it: instead, we suffer alone, and we've somehow grown to believe that the discomfort we experience is “normal”.

I've got news for you: just because something is common, does NOT make it normal.

When did we start thinking of dysfunction as normal?

Our menstrual cycles should come along on time, with ease, and without discomfort. They should be seamless: both a celebration of how amazing our bodies are, and a representation of our overall health.

How did we get to a point where we thought it was “normal” to be in agonising pain for two full days out of EVERY month? When did it become ‘business as usual’ to haemorrhage and worry that our sanitary products would leak to the point that we don’t leave the house once a month? When did we start seeing it as normal to become the bitch from hell for a couple of days every month?

You get the picture. Our bodies were never designed for this kind of discomfort. Mother Nature is *way* more clever than that. Her intention for our menstrual cycle was to allow us to ovulate, so that we could produce an egg that could then be fertilised and create the amazing miracle that every baby is.

FULL. STOP.

Additionally, what you probably weren’t told is that your menstrual cycle is a sign of your hormonal health. If you’re like all too many women, you’re experiencing one or more of the following each month:

- Period pain
- Back pain
- Heavy bleeding
- No bleeding
- Irregular cycles
- Ongoing bleeding
- Abnormal discharge
- Sore, swollen breasts
- Acne
- Bloating
- Fluid retention
- Food cravings or overeating
- Weight gain
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Male pattern hair growth
- Decreased libido
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Mood swings
- Irritability
- Anger
- Tearfulness
- Loneliness
- Lowered self-esteem...
- (and the list goes on!)

These are all very clear signs that your hormones are unhappy. They're also signs that your health is not optimal.

There are over 100 known symptoms related to period discomfort; and somehow they're all normal – or at least we've come to believe they are. However, I'm guessing that you're reading this book because you're searching for a better solution: one that will give you the life you want at any time of the month.

These symptoms are the language of your body. They're your body saying something like, "Hey! Something's not right here. Maybe you should take better care of me. Maybe you should give me a little more sleep, or feed me nutritious foods".

The problem is that we don't listen to our bodies: either because we've lost the ability to, or because nobody ever told us we should. So instead, our bodies end up screaming at us, using pain, crazy emotions and the rest, until we're forced to stop and take care of ourselves. (And let me tell you this for free: pumping Nurofen into ourselves on a monthly basis so we can soldier on is NOT taking care of ourselves!)

Here's a different way to look at the issue instead. Maybe our periods have got so out of whack because of this crazy, busy life we lead. Maybe our monthly cycles are trying to slow us down. Maybe this list of over 100 symptoms that women experience each month is our bodies' way of telling us that we *desperately* need to get some rest, relaxation and nurturing.

Maybe Mother Nature is clever after all?

What is trying to soldier on costing you in your life?

If you added up all the days in your life that are negatively impacted by your periods, you'd probably be surprised. Let's do the maths.

- Every woman is different; but if, on average, you suffer for three days out of every cycle, that's 36 days of every year...
- In other words, that's over *one full month* out of every year that your life is negatively impacted due to your periods...
- So, after twelve years, that means *one whole year* of your life has been negatively affected by your periods...

Feel free to take a little time to let that soak in.

And what else is all that monthly discomfort costing you? No swimming and outdoor activities every month? Relationship arguments? Unwanted solitude? Missed days from work? Angry behavior towards your kids? Infertility? Hysterectomy? It could be all of the above and more. The longer women believe that this is normal, the longer our lives are being lost to a “bloody” menstrual cycle. (Ha, did you like the pun?)

I need you to know that you have the power to change this hormonal disaster. It’s time for you to live the life you deserve to live, without all the debilitating symptoms holding you back.

It’s my purpose, with this book to give you the knowledge to better your menstrual cycle, to better your hormonal health, and to better your overall health, so you can be a better you.

I’ve seen the cost of ignoring our bodies

My passion for health certainly didn’t start with a focus on periods. Instead, sadly, it was ignited by my childhood experiences around ill health.

My mother died at the very young age of 33 from oesophageal and stomach cancer. She died just six months after her initial diagnosis; so she’d had the cancer for quite some time before it was found.

At age 13, I remember seeing bottles of Mylanta in every cupboard in the house; and I remember the sound of my mum’s frequent burps. They sounded like a grown man had just downed a yard glass. I remember her sleeping a lot when she wasn’t working too.

Now, with my knowledge of health, I realise that her body was screaming at her, but she’d just stopped listening. Instead, she kept suppressing her symptoms until no amount of Mylanta could take away her pain.

Ten years later, my father died of a massive heart attack at the young age of 46. He’d been experiencing heartburn for months. He too had tried Mylanta and other stomach acid blockers, and nothing seemed to work. Little did he know that he was having minor heart attacks. His body, too, was screaming at him; but like my mother, he didn’t know how to listen.

Both of my parents had forgotten how to speak the language of their

bodies. They were both living a life that was detrimental to their health: one that caused their symptoms; and dare I say it, caused their deaths too. I don't blame them, of course. No-one could. They simply didn't know that what they were doing was leading them to their deaths.

We weren't brought up knowing just how much being healthy impacts our lives. My parents had no idea that they had the power to change their health and change their outcome.

It wasn't until much later, when I was on a health retreat in Thailand, that I learnt about the power of a healthy lifestyle. I was actually there trying to lose some weight before my visit home after travelling a few years abroad. Only at that moment in my life did I realise the true power my body has – and all of our bodies have – to heal itself, given the right food, lifestyle and mindset. It was my lightbulb moment, my 'AHA!' moment, and I was hooked from then on.

My life changed forever.

Does that sound overly dramatic?

Through telling my story about my parents, I'm hoping to make a big impact in your mind. I'm telling you about their early deaths to evoke a sense of responsibility – not just in you, but in everyone. We are all responsible for our health. We *are* all responsible for our ultimate outcomes.

You hold the power – every single day, at every single meal – to lead a healthier life. Your choices around food, exercise, smoking, drinking and negative thoughts all affect your health for better or worse.

You have the choice.

You might be saying, "That's all a little dramatic, isn't it? I've just got a painful period, after all!" And in some ways you're right, you won't die from a painful period.

Remember, though: a painful period is still a representation of your overall health. It's certainly not ideal on its own – let alone when you consider the impact we calculated above. Just to refresh your memory; that cost was a full month out of every year. Who wants to be out of action and not functioning at their absolute best for a whole month out of every year?

Then consider that your painful period just might be your body's

way of getting your attention before something more serious develops. Will you keep ignoring it, as you've always done, or will you start to listen?

You choose!

How to use this book

My background and experience

The Internet has seen an explosion of information. Whether it's true or not – whether it's come from a reputable source or not – that information is still out there to confuse people (including me). Especially in the food, lifestyle and wellness space, there's been an explosion of bloggers who all have their own takes on the topics.

What's great about this wellness explosion is that it shows there's a growing trend towards healthier lifestyles. It shows that people are looking beyond what the mainstream is telling them, to find answers that might work better for them. Women, especially, are looking for answers to help them live lives that allow them to reach their potential.

But all that conflicting information is confusing, right? There are so *many* diets or ways of eating; and it's almost become cool to be a part of one of these movements. People are even using their way of eating as a way of defining themselves. They'll say, "I'm paleo", "I'm vegetarian", or "I'm vegan" and the list goes on.

This movement means people are becoming more interested in a healthier way of living; but those labels can also be damaging. And I do mean damaging to their health: sometimes excluding certain foods can feel good to begin with, but it can cause other health complaints further down the track. On top of that, trying to solve a tricky, nuanced problem like a period complaint can be a minefield at the best of times. A lot of the information online will steer you in a direction that may not help: it might even possibly make things worse.

So where do I fit into all this? What makes me any different?

I'm a qualified Naturopath with an Advanced Diploma of Naturopathy, which included three years of nutritional medicine. We learnt nutrition according to the Australian Dietary Recommendations. That sounds great on the surface, but I've gotta say: after I helped my patients implement these recommendations, they just didn't see the results I expected.

That prompted me to do a little digging around. The result of that "digging around" not only changed the way I practiced as a Naturopath, but also the way my family eats on a daily basis.

A quick word about the nutritional recommendations in this book

Nutrition is a field in which there are *many opinions*. Not everyone will agree with every recommendation I make; and not every recommendation I make will agree with each individual. That's because we're all so different, and our bodies all have different genetics, different microbiomes¹, different environments and different histories. But I bet that every woman who reads this book could adopt 80% of the recommendations, and see great results.

I'll be discussing some controversial topics in this book – topics like dairy, sugar, carbs and gluten. Some people will like what I say, and some won't. That's perfectly OK: this is not a one-size-fits-all book. No single general recommendation could possibly be right for every one of us.

That's why it's so important to work alongside a health professional when you're making dietary changes of any kind. It's especially important when illnesses and imbalances are present. Your treatment needs to be customised to you, your body, your immune system, your intolerances, your environment and so on.

For most people, I don't believe that removing any major food group is ideal. Instead, I believe in a balanced approach to dietary fats, proteins and carbohydrates. I also believe that for MOST women, moderation is the key. Some illnesses and conditions certainly require stricter dietary restrictions, but this book is not written for these people.

¹ Our bodies are naturally home to all kinds of different micro-organisms: bacteria (friendly and otherwise), fungi, yeasts, and various others. The genetic material of all these micro-organisms in your body is called your "microbiome" (see Chapter 13 for more detail).

Personally, I live by the 80/20 rule. 80% of the time my family and I eat according to the recommendations you'll soon learn within this book. That then allows us 20% of the time to enjoy treats and to allow for eating out, birthday parties and visits to Nan and Pops.

So the recommendations you read in this book are a culmination of my studies, my research and my opinions. I've used them to get great results with my patients; always explaining how I've ended up reaching my conclusions for each one. And to be honest, there are still issues on which I don't know where I stand. As new evidence comes forth, though, I'm sure I'll find an answer that sits well with me sooner or later.

My aim is to give you a guide that's both scientifically solid, and practical

This book is not a scientific text, but the information within it is based on sound science.

A large part of my recommendations also come down to what I feel is realistic and sustainable over a lifetime for you, my patients, and the majority of women. Restrictions that are overly harsh can be too hard to follow. That means people can't maintain the changes, so they end up reverting to their old ways, and stay stuck with their illness or debilitating condition.

My intention in writing this book was to help as many women as possible to improve their hormonal health. That means my recommendations need to be realistic and sustainable.

Only that way will this book take you on a journey to discover what works for YOU; and what gives you a healthier, more sustainable outcome.

How to use this book

To make the journey as intuitive and logical as possible for you, I've divided the book into four sections:

- Section 1 gives you the knowledge that will empower you to become the expert of your own body and menstrual cycle. Here you'll learn everything you need to know about your "lady bits", as well the hormones that control your menstrual cycle, and how they can tell you when things aren't quite right.

In Chapter 3, you'll find useful tables that cover your main reproductive hormones. In each table, you'll see a list of the symptoms you're likely to suffer if you have an excess of, or deficiency in, each hormone (as well as how you should feel with adequate amounts). Chapter 5 will help you to become aware of the signs and symptoms your body gives you each month to tell you when you're fertile, when you've ovulated and whether your hormones are balanced or not.

I'd recommend reading these two chapters for *every* woman.

- Section 2 explains the most common current solution out there for period problems. In this section, you'll learn all about the types of contraceptives that contain synthetic hormones, what they do within your body, and the possible side-effects that they may have. You'll also discover non-hormonal contraception options that are worth considering.
- Section 3 is where you start learning how to have the "perfect period" and live the life you want to live all through the month – *without* hormonal contraception. You'll discover new ways of thinking, eating, living and supplementing that will assist you in balancing your hormones and improving your menstrual and overall health.

I know the information in this section can be overwhelming and technical at times. To help you navigate it, I'll alert you to the technical stuff; so if it gets too much, you can skim that part. Keep reading though: at the end of each chapter are tools, activities and suggestions that will improve that part of your health, and help you to make long-lasting changes for a healthier period.

- And finally, Section 4 helps you to gather your thoughts and points you in the direction of your "next step". That's vital because simply

reading this book won't do anything: to get the results you want, you actually need to take action on what you read. That's why this section is designed to keep you on track so you can truly make the changes necessary for better health.

IMPORTANT (I know I said this previously, but it's so essential, I want to repeat it here): There's a huge amount of information in this book – so much that you're likely to feel overwhelmed. Remember that not all information is necessary for every person.

Rather than trying to take it all in, identify what's most relevant to you as an individual, and start with that; or seek the help of a qualified natural healthcare practitioner to guide you through the process.

Medical Disclaimer

None of the information within this book is meant to diagnose or treat any disease. It is *especially* not meant to be used as a substitute for medical advice.

Please always consult your healthcare practitioner before you start any treatment for any condition you may have. Any changes you make to your food and lifestyle choices are your own responsibility.

If you have any questions around any medical condition, you must ask your physician or other qualified health practitioner; and you should never disregard or delay the advice they give you.

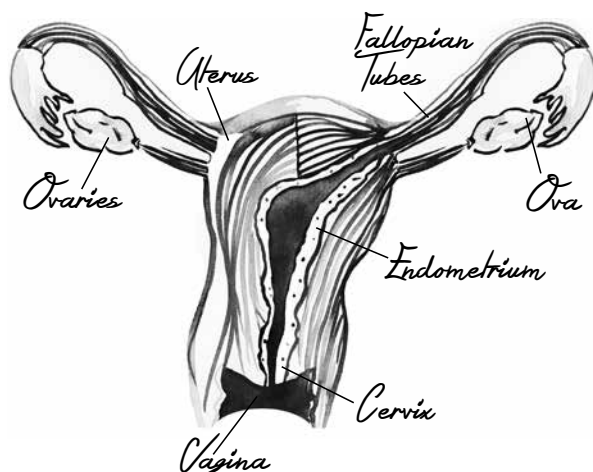
Section 1

BECOME THE EXPERT OF YOUR OWN MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Meet Your Lady Bits

Ok ladies, I know we all get a little squirmy when we talk about our lady bits. Heaven forbid someone actually uses the word “vagina”. But we’ve all been to the doctors with our concerns, and most of us have all had the ever-so-uncomfortable (but necessary) Pap Smear. It is what it is. There’s nothing to be embarrassed about, and it’s time to embrace our lady bits, get to know them, and call them exactly what they are.

Your lady bits hold power: the power to love, the power to orgasm, and the power to grow and then birth a human being. They’re a pretty amazing structure. They’re also a big part of what makes you a woman and gives you your femininity; and they need to be respected and represented. So here they are, in all their glory: YOUR LADY BITS!



I'll discuss all these bits on at least one – if not more – occasion throughout the book, so I thought an introduction was necessary now. I've described each part in more detail below:

Vulva

The picture above doesn't show the vulva, because it focuses on the menstrual anatomy. But for “lady bits” completion, the vulva must be mentioned.

Your vulva consists of all the anatomical bits that are external to your vagina. Those parts include, but aren't limited to, the following: your mons pubis, labia majora, labia minora, clitoris, urethral opening and vaginal opening. As well as being responsible for “giving life”, your vulva has the sexual function of providing pleasure when it's stimulated correctly.

Vagina

Your vagina is a muscular structure that's around 10-15cm long, and reaches from your vulva to your cervix. Its elastic nature allows it to stretch during intercourse or childbirth, and it's also the passage through which menstrual blood and vaginal secretions flow.

Cervix

Your cervix is the lower part of your uterus, and it naturally protrudes into the upper parts of your vagina. Your cervical tip opens to allow blood and sperm to pass through it; and it can stretch up to 10cm during childbirth.

Your cervix produces cervical fluid within your cervical crypts: channels that line your cervix. This cervical fluid is the substance that sperm can live in for up to five days.

Your cervical tip is also the place that a doctor checks for abnormal cells during a Pap Smear.

Uterus

Your uterus – also known as your womb – is a hollow, muscular organ that's shaped like a flattened, upside-down pear. This structure houses a growing baby, and has the ability to contract during childbirth. It also releases menstrual blood every month.

Endometrium – AKA “Uterine lining”

Your endometrium is the lining of your uterus that – due to hormonal influences – builds up every cycle to prepare for a potential pregnancy.

During the first phase of your cycle (after menstruation), the cells in your endometrium proliferate, and the number of blood vessels within it increases. In the last two weeks of your cycle, your endometrium thickens and fills with blood to provide the best environment for a fertilised egg. If no pregnancy occurs, your endometrium is shed as your period.

Fallopian tubes

You have two fallopian tubes that extend from the top left and right side of your uterus. These are muscular tubes, about 10cm long, that reach out towards your ovaries to collect your eggs with finger-like projections called fimbriae.

Your fallopian tubes are lined with microscopic hairs called cilia, which move in a continual wave-like motion to help move an egg towards your uterus. It is in your fallopian tubes that an egg will be fertilised by any sperm.

Ovaries

You also have two ovaries, one on each side of your uterus, that are oval-shaped and similar in size to an almond. Your ovaries are attached to your uterus by an ovarian ligament, which holds them close to the fimbriae of your fallopian tubes. Your ovaries house immature and maturing eggs that are each surrounded by a group of cells called a follicle. They also produce the hormones oestrogen and progesterone during your reproductive years.

All of these amazing anatomical structures work together, every month, to bring about your menstrual cycle. It's elegant; and when everything works together in harmony, it's a healthy, beautiful thing.

To read more...
purchase this book online at:

www.asnatureintended.com.au



\$25