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# Women's Cycles & Reflexology

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# Greetings From Team RAC

The summer months are usually quieter ones for all of us at Team RAC Head Office. It offers an opportunity to consolidate and get ready for the major push for membership renewal starting in late October. This year, however, things are different as we prepare for the **2008 Conference and AGM** in Montreal this November.

Registrations are already past the 100 mark with participants from as far afield as Australia already registered. This promises to be the biggest and best ever RAC conference and could well prove to be the biggest Reflexology conference ever held in Canada. At the end of it we expect that RAC will once again be well-marked as the only truly national reflexology association on the international Reflexology map. You can help make it happen by registering to join us at the Conference and by reminding others of the benefits of RAC. Our future lies in our strength and our strength will be determined by the size of our membership.

We believe that professionalism is a key word in any Association – as true for RAC as for any other. We are determined that our standards will be constantly improving and that RAC will provide the benchmark by which every reflexologist in Canada is judged. That has meant – and will continue to mean – that we need to make decisions and take action that may take us in to new territory with the initial discomfort that is often associated with change. Rest assured that none of these decisions are taken lightly or made without a great deal of forethought and planning. We are aware that, for some members, a change of direction may require a difficult adjustment. We believe that these decisions are the best for the Association and urge you, when reacting to these changes, to consider how they will impact on the future of the association and the image of the profession. If something still doesn't seem right to you, then please call us and let's talk it through together so that we can move

forward together on fulfilling the true promise of this profession and its practitioners.

We are determined that reflexology in Canada will be as widely recognized and accepted as it is in so many other parts of the world and with your participation, help and commitment we can make that happen soon. The immediate future promises more exciting plans and incentives to make RAC membership even more rewarding. RCRT members will receive further rewards that will reinforce the benefit of joining the RAC Continuing Education programme.

Enjoy the rest of the summer and gather all your energies for November in Montreal when you will really see the power and potential of your Association! ❖

## **Mot de bienvenue de l'Équipe-ACR**

Ici aux bureaux de l'ACR, les mois d'été sont normalement assez calmes, ce qui nous donne la chance de nous organiser et nous préparer pour la campagne d'adhésion vers la fin d'octobre. Mais cette année, la réalité est autre car nous nous préparons pour la **conférence 2008 et l'assemblée générale annuelle** à Montréal en novembre.

Déjà plus de 100 personnes se sont inscrites, y compris des participants venant d'aussi loin que l'Australie. Cette conférence sera sans doute la plus grande et connaîtra le plus grand succès de toutes les conférences de l'ACR, et pourrait même devenir la plus grande conférence de réflexologie jamais vue au Canada. Suivant la conférence, nous nous attendions à ce que l'ACR se révèle encore une fois la seule association de réflexologie véritablement nationale qui existe sur la scène internationale. Vous pouvez nous aider à réussir cet objectif en vous inscrivant à la conférence et en parlant à vos collègues des bienfaits de l'ACR. Notre avenir dépend de la force de l'association, et sa force est déterminée par son effectif.

# Mot de bienvenue de l'Équipe-ACR

Nous croyons que le professionnalisme est le mot-clé de toute association, et l'ACR ne fait pas exception à la règle. Nous nous consacrons à l'amélioration continue de nos normes et sommes convaincus que l'ACR fournira le standard auquel tout réflexologue au Canada sera comparé. Cela veut dire, et continuera à vouloir dire, que nous devons prendre des décisions et poser des gestes qui pourront nous pousser dans de nouvelles directions où nous ressentirons peut-être le malaise associé au changement. Soyez assuré qu'aucune de ces décisions n'est prise à la légère ni sans beaucoup de réflexion et de planification. Nous sommes conscients du fait que, pour certains membres, ce changement de direction pourrait être difficile. Nous croyons que ces décisions sont pour le bien de l'association et nous vous encourageons, en lisant ces changements, à réfléchir sur l'impact qu'ils auront sur l'association ainsi que sur l'image publique de la profession. Si vous avez encore des préoccupations, veuillez nous appeler

et nous en parlerons ensemble pour que nous puissions poursuivre notre objectif qui est d'honorer la promesse de cette profession et de ses praticiens.

Nous nous acharnons à faire reconnaître la réflexologie au Canada comme elle est déjà reconnue dans plusieurs parties du globe. Avec votre participation, votre aide et votre engagement, nous réussirons bientôt notre objectif. L'avenir immédiat est rempli de plans excitants et de mesures incitatives pour qu'une adhésion à l'ACR soit encore plus avantageuse. Les réflexologues agréés recevront des avantages additionnels qui rendront encore plus intéressant un abonnement au programme de formation continue de l'ACR.

Profitez du reste de l'été et rechargez vos batteries pour la conférence en novembre à Montréal où vous verrez comme jamais avant la force et le potentiel de votre association! ❖

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# Herstory of the women's cycles and Reflexology

## HISTOIRE AU FEMININ DU CYCLE MENSTRUEL ET LA REFLEXOLOGIE

*Auteure : Lyndall Mollart, RN. RM. Ma Mid. Dip. Reflexology*

### HORMONES DE FECONDITE

Les hormones sont les messagers chimiques qui maintiennent l'homéostasie corporelle en coordonnant et en réglant les activités des cellules, des tissus, des organes et des systèmes<sup>1</sup>. Les systèmes hormonaux et de reproduction de la femme sont contrôlés et initiés, comme chez l'homme, par la glande pituitaire située au bas du cerveau. J'expliquerai d'abord l'interaction magique des quatre hormones de fécondité principales : l'œstrogène, la progestérone, l'hormone lutéinisante et l'hormone folliculostimulante.

## HERSTORY OF THE WOMEN'S CYCLES AND REFLEXOLOGY

*Author: Lyndall Mollart, RN. RM. Ma Mid. Dip. Reflexology*

### HORMONES OF FERTILITY

Hormones are chemical messengers that preserve body homeostasis by co-ordinating and regulating the activities of other cells, tissues, organs and systems.<sup>1</sup> The woman's hormonal and reproductive systems are controlled and initiated, as with the man, by the pituitary gland which is located at the base on the brain. I will firstly briefly describe the magic interplay of the four main hormones of fertility: Oestrogen, Progesterone, Luteinizing Hormone (LH) and Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH).

**Oestrogens** are ovarian hormones and are responsible for the secondary sex characteristics (typical female shape, axillary and pubic hair, breast/uterus/vagina growth and development, and early maturation of bones) which appear in girls at the time of puberty. Oestrogens are also

responsible for some of the changes which occur during the menstrual cycle and in pregnancy.<sup>2,3</sup> During the menstrual cycle oestrogens help to control the follicle phase of the menstrual cycle. FSH from the anterior pituitary gland causes the ovarian follicles to grow and stimulates the production of oestrogen.

As the levels of oestrogen rises, it inhibits further production of FSH but stimulates the release of LH (from the anterior pituitary gland) which causes the release of the ripest egg from its follicle at ovulation. When the level of oestrogen falls at the end of the secretory phase of the cycle, the feedback mechanism recommences. At the time of ovulation, the cervix softens and rises and its opening widens, cervical mucus increases and becomes thinner to facilitate the passage of the sperm. Also there is premenstrual retention of water and electrolytes.<sup>2,3</sup>

**Progesterone** is also an ovarian hormone released by the corpus luteum after ovulation for a period of approximately 12 days. During the menstrual cycle progesterone causes: a slight rise in body temperature at the time of ovulation, cervical mucus to lessen and thicken, secretory changes in the endometrium in preparation for the reception of a fertilised ovum, the ovary to stop releasing eggs and premenstrual retention of water and electrolytes.<sup>2,3</sup>

**FSH** governs the development of the graafian follicle within the ovary and the formation of oestrogens by the follicle.<sup>2</sup>

**LH** governs the development of the corpus luteum. The corpus luteum is the ruptured graafian follicle which changes with the multiplying granulosa cells and functions as an endocrine gland with the formation of oestrogens and progesterone for 12-16 days, after which it degenerates if fertilisation has not occurred. Within the next 48 hours menstruation occurs.<sup>2,3</sup>

Individual women may have menstrual cycles that vary from much shorter to much longer than normal, however, ovulation is nearly always

## Herstory (cont.)

about 14 days before the next period.<sup>2,3</sup> The menstrual cycle is generally the length of a lunar month – not calendar month. The hypothalamus and pituitary gland are responsive to increased levels of light such as that of the full moon, so it's no accident that the menstrual cycles are generally over 28 days (4 week).<sup>1,3</sup>

### MENSTRUAL CYCLE, MOONS AND CALENDARS

According to Sjooa and Mor (1987) menstruation means 'moon change' and 'mind change'<sup>4</sup> which family members can agree on as many women experience mood swings and mind changes as they nears their 'period' time. If we look deeper the Sanskrit word "moon" is a measurement and the same root word as 'month', 'menstrual', 'menopause' and 'mind'. The moon and women cycle on a regular basis (whether they wish to or not!).<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that women established the first calendar, marking time via the menstrual cycle! Davis and Leonard<sup>5</sup> reminds us that pre-literate women cut notches on sticks to establish lunar months; and the ancient Mayans and Chinese women developed lunar calendars over 3 thousand years ago. The lunar calendar has 13 months - in contrast to the 12 month Julian calendar we use today.<sup>5</sup>

Whether we are looking at birth, death or any of the cycles which women experience in between, there is so much more to explore than many people are aware of. For this article I have concentrated on the menstrual cycle, and some of the resulting cycling conditions that occur. I will discuss the use of the reflexology technique "Endocrine Balance" as described by Susanne Enzer.<sup>6</sup>

### HERSTORY OR HISTORY

New analyses of old evidence means we need to re-evaluate our present belief around the 'herstory' (rather than 'history') of women's blood and the menstrual cycle. The word 'taboo' is sometimes associated with menstruation, and Judy Grahn (1993) shows that the word comes from a Polynesian word meaning both "sacred" and "menstruation".

Sarah Wickham proposes we consider "*how different it must have been to live in a society where having periods were considered sacred*"<sup>4</sup> (p10).<sup>4</sup>

Interpretation of history suggests that menstruating women were and are still, to this day in some cultures, segregated from the rest of society because they are dirty. But what if they separated themselves because they understood how magical they were and wanted to tap into that magic in an all-female environment?<sup>2,4</sup> Many cultures celebrated this segregation which allowed women to rest and recuperate from hard work for a few days each month, enabling them to have a really good time with their women friends.<sup>4,5</sup> Our modern culture still seems to have far more words which seem negative to describe 'periods', reinforcing the idea that menstruating and bleeding is not something to be proud of: 'the curse', 'on the

*Continued on Page 7*

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What is being done in the field of Reflexology and research for cancer? What are the results of this work? What are the benefits reported by both patients and Doctors? What kind of research, medical evidence and empiric facts can be considered as valid?

We have taken the initiative to gather the most renowned personalities in the field of Reflexology and Cancer to deal with all these questions and more.

We wish to open a discussion that enables us to balance the pros and cons, the benefits and the risks of applying Reflexology for patients who are being treated for cancer. All these ideas together will help us bring this discussion to the awareness to not only Reflexologists and Caregivers, but to the public in general.

See you in Israel in October 2008!  
Shalom,

Mauricio (Moshe) Kruchik  
President of Israeli Forum of Reflexology

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## Herstory (cont.)

rag’, or ‘surfing the crimson way’. Yet, it is amazing that menstrual blood was often alluded to “*as a flower yet to bear fruit, but containing the soul of the future*”<sup>5</sup> (p137).

While modern times and scientific thinking brought great improvements to some aspects of people’s lives, many of the advances of modernity are double-edged swords. Women’s lives have been saved in complicated childbirth or pathological gynaecological situations,<sup>6</sup> but we have lost the Mystery and Magic.<sup>5</sup> What are we teaching our young women about the magic of womanhood and cycles? Young girls watch TV advertisements for ‘sanitary products’ which will hide away their blood from the rest of the world and allow them to carry on ‘normally’, as if nothing is happening!<sup>4</sup> Do they wonder why the liquid used to demonstrate the absorbency of the products is never red?

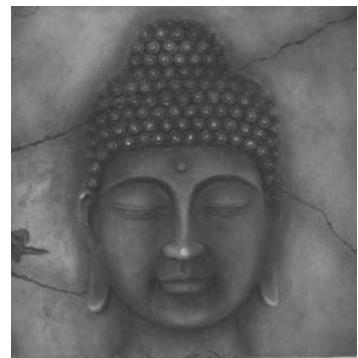
In school classes young adults learn about hormones and the menstrual cycle in terms of tissue proliferation and tissue shedding in a dry and technical manner (such as this article’s opening paragraphs) and not in relation to the different feelings women might experience at different times of their cycle, or how their ways of thinking and being might change throughout the month.<sup>4,5</sup> They are also shown “*pictures straight out of medical textbooks, showing cross-sections of women’s reproductive systems, quite divorced from the hormones and feelings which conducted the orchestra of their cycles*”(p35).<sup>4</sup> Susanne Enzer had a great vision and developed the concept (and video) of the “Hormone hat” to show young people (and older ones too!) what is happening during the cycle of a woman’s life physically and emotionally, from child to matriarch. Anyone who has been lucky enough to view this amazing video appreciates Sue’s talent in combining humour, art and science to show how the hormones of fertility have a profound affect not only on women, but also on their men folk, families and friends!<sup>6</sup>

Davis and Leonard<sup>5</sup> advocate that the “*manner in which the menarche<sup>1</sup> transition is experienced has much to do with the degree of confidence and independence a woman finds in subsequent stages of adult life*” (p16). How

does the journey of puberty feel to a young woman who is on this journey today? Is it something to be celebrated like Davis and Leonard<sup>5</sup> suggests with menarche rites - ceremonies which some mothers organise for their daughter’s first menstrual period? Or, is it something dirty that needs to be hidden away? If this is the accepted perception by many, it’s not surprising that many women have ‘difficult’ or painful menstrual cycles.

Society needs to start thinking about women’s cycles differently. Some women are seeking to reclaim their femininity from male-based concepts and return to a more natural approach. They are getting more in touch with natural cycles and other ways of experiencing the rhythms of life<sup>4</sup> and dancing with their hormones.<sup>7</sup> Wickham<sup>4</sup> suggests possible ways to celebrate and acknowledge the sacred time by: taking a regular monthly break (possibly by moon lodging) only for women, a time when they ‘go inside’ in order to regroup and ready

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## Herstory (cont.)

themselves for the next loop of their cycle (spiral), to take time out to learn more about who they are and what is important to them and to consider where they want to go to next.

### SOME CYCLING CONDITIONS

#### PMT/PMS

Deviations in menstrual cycles are seen as medical issues - again underlying the way this is viewed in modern society. Perhaps the most well known disease of the menstrual cycle is the so-called premenstrual tension (PMT) or pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS).<sup>4</sup> Hippocrates thought the cause of PMT was a 'wandering uterus' somehow disturbing the brain on its journey around the body. A strategy used was to burn incense at the vaginal opening to entice it back!<sup>3</sup> However, in more recent times, Francesca Naish<sup>3</sup> proposes PMS is "*usually too little progesterone, and is critically linked with the production of prostaglandins, which in turn is linked with the availability of certain nutrients*" (p193). It can also be the time to be forthright and tell the truth and get away with it!<sup>5</sup>

In many cultures, women are convinced their PMS is psychological or psychiatric and they may be persuaded by friends, doctors or media pressure to take anti-depressants or tranquilisers. If it is hormonal, then women are sold synthetic hormones to artificially cure the disease. Unfortunately, western culture does not value women's cycles and resorts to labelling these differences as wrong or pathological, rather than as variations of normal.<sup>4</sup> Also the pharmaceutical companies stand to lose immense amounts of money if the number of women seeking alternative natural remedies increases and if women realise just how much power they hold as consumers.<sup>4</sup>

**Dysmenorrhoea** or 'painful periods' can be the result of contractions and cramping of uterine muscle. Metaphysical aspect could be when women release the expectations that others have of them, and that they have of themselves. Women often find their symptoms reduce or go away completely (p61).<sup>4</sup>

**Menorrhagia** is heavy or excessive menstrual flow which could be caused by many reasons -

miscarriage, fibroids, endometriosis, blood disorders and cancer to name a few. It can also lead to anaemia.<sup>3,6</sup> Metaphysical aspect could be "*tears of frustration as the feminine part of the individual is denied its creative expression*."<sup>6</sup>

**Irregular periods** occur when they are longer or shorter than 28 days. However, personal assessment of regularity varies enormously. Irregular cycles can be due to external things such as stress, travel across time zones, ill health, diet and dramatic weight changes, fasting or drugs (medical and recreational). External things will usually lengthen the cycle, i.e. delay in ovulation.<sup>3</sup>

**Amenorrhoea** is an absence of menstrual periods and lack of ovulation for more than 6 months.<sup>3</sup> The causes could be hormonal, excessive exercise, malnutrition and certain medical conditions. Metaphysical aspect could be "*a disconnection of the feminine side as it was not accepted within the world in which they live*".<sup>6</sup>

There are many strategies and natural remedies that assist with these conditions such as yoga, dietary changes, vitamins and minerals, herbal remedies and acupuncture points. To discuss all these is beyond the scope of this article, so I will only discuss the reflexology technique Endocrine Balance. For information on the other strategies, there are many books that you can read including Francesca Naish's book - "Natural Fertility".

### REFLEXOLOGY - ENDOCRINE BALANCE

This reflexology technique (Endocrine Balance) purpose is to balance the entire endocrine system including the hypothalamus, pineal, pituitary gland (anterior and posterior), thyroid/parathyroid, thymus, pancreas, adrenals, ovaries/ testes. This powerful but painless technique can be used on women, men and children with any condition where there is an imbalance of hormones, i.e. diabetes, hyper/hypothyroid and deviations in hormones of fertility as mentioned above as well as miscarriage, pregnancy and menopause. This technique can

## Herstory (cont.)

be used with any reflexology session, preferably right at the end.

The Endocrine Balance works on three levels - physically, emotionally and energetically. To access the physical energies, the reflexologist uses firm pressure for treatment or relaxation techniques. The emotions and feelings are recorded in the feet in the soft tissues (lines, hard skin); as fluids (dry or sweaty feet, swollen); and the attitudes of the feet. So, to access the emotions and feelings, the reflexologist uses a very light touch for treatment or relaxation techniques.<sup>6</sup> The etheric energies are always around. Although they are usually invisible to most people, sometimes they can be seen as colours. To access the subtle energies which are not of a physical nature, the reflexologist uses sensing techniques and should be open to intuition.<sup>6</sup>

Reflexology uses the concept of 10 longitudinal zones along which the reflexology impulses pass both feet. A perception of many reflexologists is that energy also moves across the space between the feet - the interface between left and right. In this Endocrine Balance, the space is termed the O-zone.<sup>6</sup> Susanne Enzer<sup>6</sup> describes that the reflexology Endocrine Balance uses all the above mentioned concepts - *“it begins by physically stimulating the reflex zones, and then using a light touch to inform the senses that the system is working together. It continues by using the O-zone to balance left and right and finishes with intention from the practitioner for balance and harmony”* (p30).

### LAST QUOTE

My last quote comes from Sarah Wickham<sup>4</sup> as she reminds women not to forget how valuable they are to themselves as well as others - *“we forget how well our bodies carry out their responsibilities.... And we forget how much the world depends on us. If we could only remember how very valuable, powerful and essential we are to the running of the planet, and how well our bodies work to enable us to do all of these things, I suspect that everything else would probably follow”* (p173).<sup>4</sup>

**Let's Dance with Hormones!**

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### RAC Conference and AGM

Montreal, QC

November 7 - 11, 2008

[www.reflexologycanada.ca](http://www.reflexologycanada.ca)

### Reflexology Association of Australia

Sydney, Australia

October 24- 26, 2008

[www.reflexology.org.au](http://www.reflexology.org.au)

September 21-27

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