

# SELF CARE FOR WOMEN

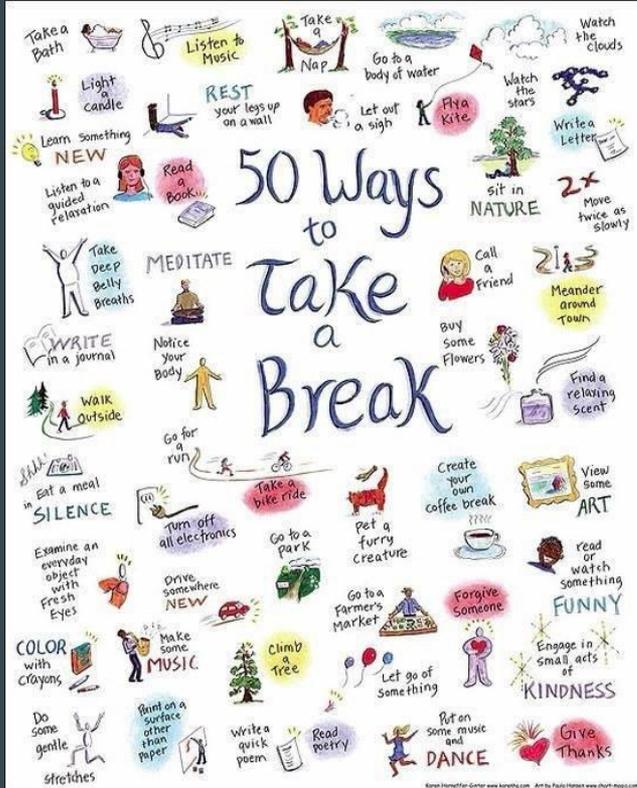
## *Fertility Awareness & Cycle Tracking*



*Animation by the amazing Libby VanderPloeg*

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# Foundations + Ritual + Practice = Resilience



We cannot avoid suffering, but self-care is a way to strengthen ourselves, build resilience, and solidify our inner core, so that we can deal with the bad stuff when it comes at us.

*Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.*

*—Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light (1988)*

# *What We're Learning Tonight*

## PART I :: FOUNDATIONS

1. **FERTILITY AWARENESS**  
The basics, like how your cycle works
2. **CYCLE TRACKING**  
The logistics
3. **FOOD, HERBS, OILS FOR HORMONE BALANCE**  
Balance hormones naturally with herbs, oils & diet

## PART II :: RITUALS

1. **DAILY RITUALS**  
Using the foundations
2. **MINDFULNESS EXERCISE**  
Stress reduction for hormone balance
3. **MEND ME MINUTES for BALANCE**  
We'll learn a ritual of massage, stretching, meditation
4. **POW-WOW**  
We'll have the last 15 minutes or so to connect, ask questions and reflect

# Foundation # 1 *What is Fertility Awareness*

## FERTILITY AWARENESS

Also called Natural Family Planning (NFP), the Sympto-Thermal Method, the Ovulation Method, the Billings Method

**NOT** the “pullout method”, aka “withdrawal”

**NOT** the Rhythm Method

**NOT** STD prevention

## NATURAL BIRTH CONTROL, WITHOUT DRUGS

Combination of cycle tracking, basal body temperature data, cervical mucus data, and cervical position data.

To be birth control, you combine all of these things, plus any extra data on your cycle to create a database of **you**.

## FOR PLANNING, BOTH PREVENTION AND PREGNANCY

It works both ways: as a means of preventing pregnancy and as a way to target the most fertile time for getting pregnant.

# Foundation # 1 *Why Fertility Awareness*

## KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

### LEARN HOW YOUR CYCLE WORKS

So you can control and support your fertility, hormones, and overall health.

How many days is your cycle this month? When do you ovulate, bleed, PMS? And why?

Fertility Awareness is learning your body's fertility language through:

1. Your basal body temperature
2. Your cervical fluid
3. The position of your cervix

### BALANCE YOUR HORMONES

Hand in hand with learning about your cycle is **balancing** your cycle. If you are missing periods, suffer from PCOS, low thyroid, etc., these can be managed with a self-care regimen of herbs, diet, exercise, and stress management.

### CONTROL YOUR FERTILITY

Once you start doing the above, you can control when (or if ever!) you get pregnant.

You can diminish the effects of stress, environmental aggressors, and natural hormonal shifts by balancing your hormones and estrogen levels with herbs, diet, and exercise.

# How Your Cycle Works

Your cycle begins on the first day of your period (CD1) and normally lasts 21 to 35 days.

## THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE CONSISTS OF 2 PHASES

### 1. PRE-OVULATORY (FOLLICULAR) PHASE

The duration varies woman to woman and throughout your life (stress can cause delayed ovulation)

:: OVULATION happens (the midpoint between these phases) ::

### 2. POST-OVULATORY (LUTEAL) PHASE

← *you can't get pregnant*

Progesterone causes your temperature to rise in the second luteal phase, once ovulation has occurred. This phase is 12 to 16 days long, and is almost always the same for you throughout your life. If your phase is less than 12 days, it is very hard to have a viable pregnancy.

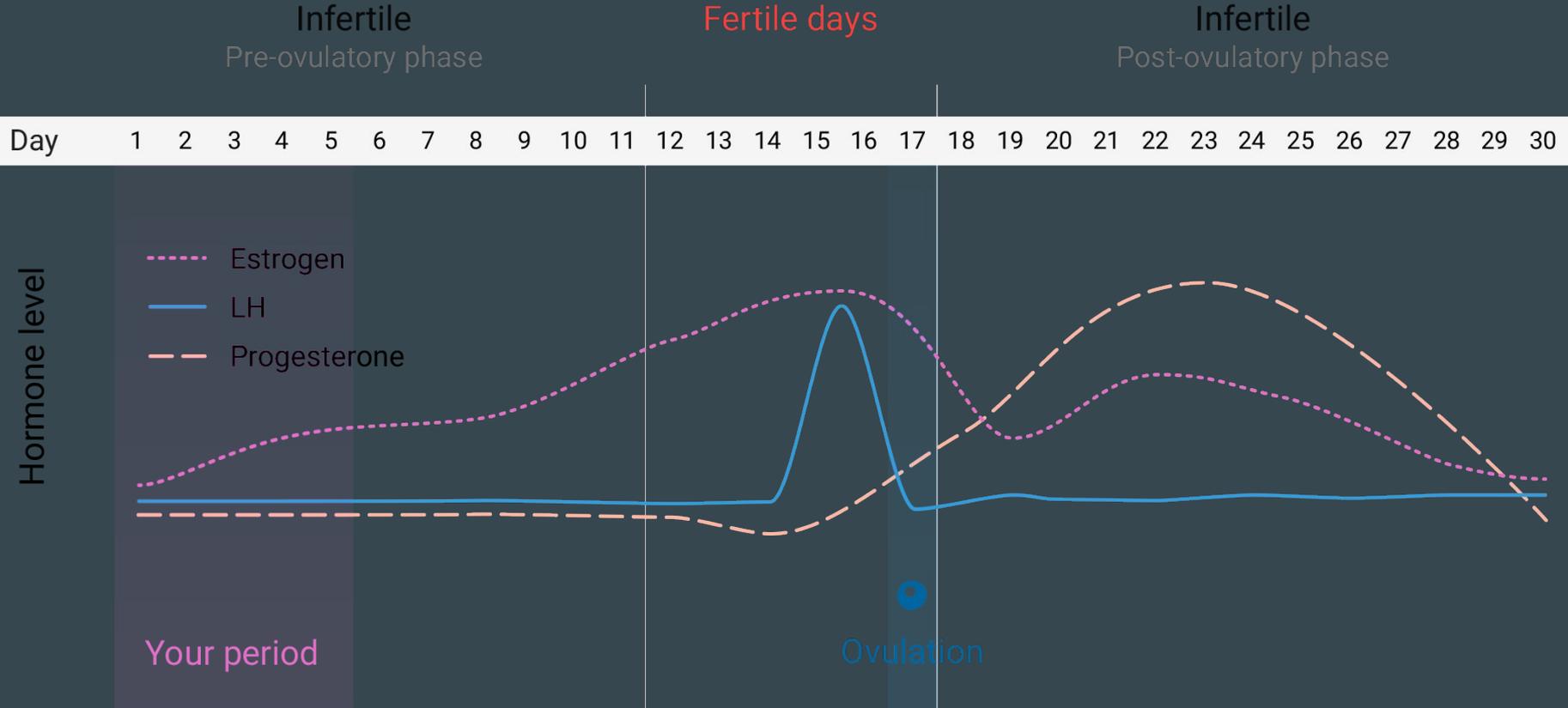
Your body temperature usually rises by 0.2-0.45 °C due to the increase of progesterone hormone levels.

This is the main indicator that determines when you are ovulating.

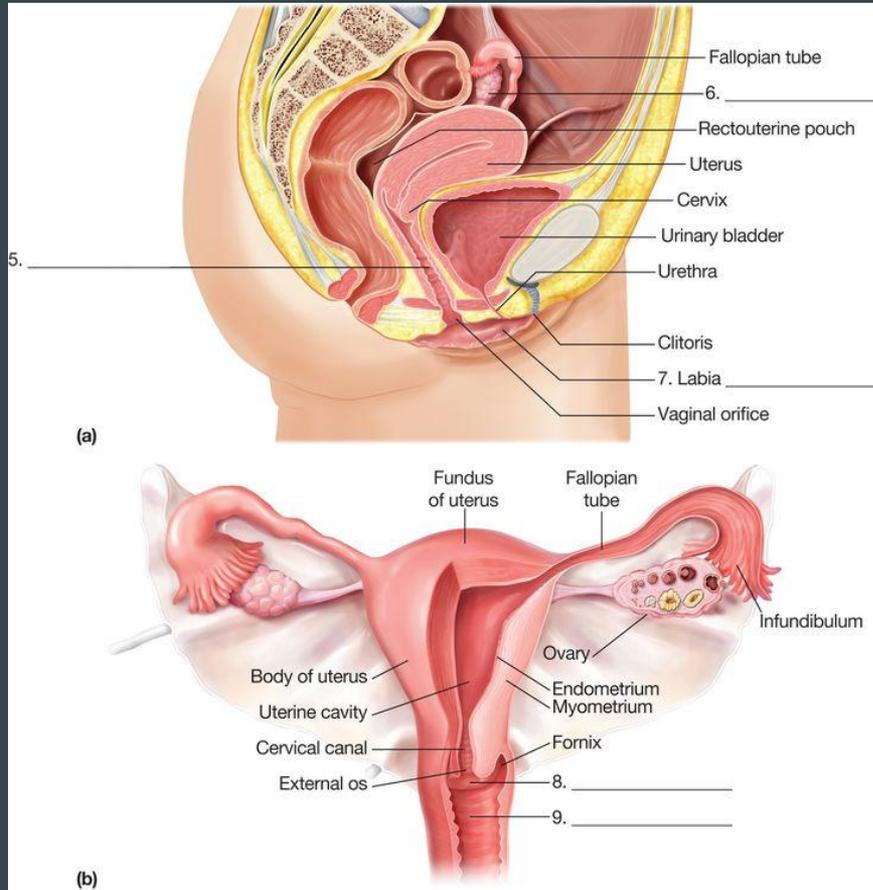
Another optional indicator is the Luteinizing Hormones (LH) which surge just before ovulation occurs.

Women can only get pregnant on 6 days maximum in one cycle. These fertile days include the day of ovulation and how long sperm can survive within the body.

# How your cycle works



# The Amazing & Beautiful Female Reproductive Anatomy



# How Your Cycle Works: A 29-Day Snapshot

**DAY 1:** Menstrual flow is ON, the beginning of your cycle commences! Yee-haw.

**DAY 7:** Your uterine lining is all shed (no more blood)! High-five.

**DAY 11-13:** Hormones in your body get the egg ready to be released, you might see clear discharge begin.

**DAYS 14 to 15** (Ovulation times vary per woman and per cycle!): Hormones in your body cause the egg to be released from the ovary, which is known as ovulation. The egg travels through the fallopian tube towards the uterus (“surfing” on cervical fluid) and is only available to be fertilized for **12-24 hours** during this window.

> If sperm penetrates the egg, the fertilized egg will attach to the lining of the uterus and begin to grow.

> If fertilization does not happen, the egg breaks apart. Bye, bye.

**DAYS 16 to 28:** body temperature rises, hormone levels stay slightly elevated until your next period.

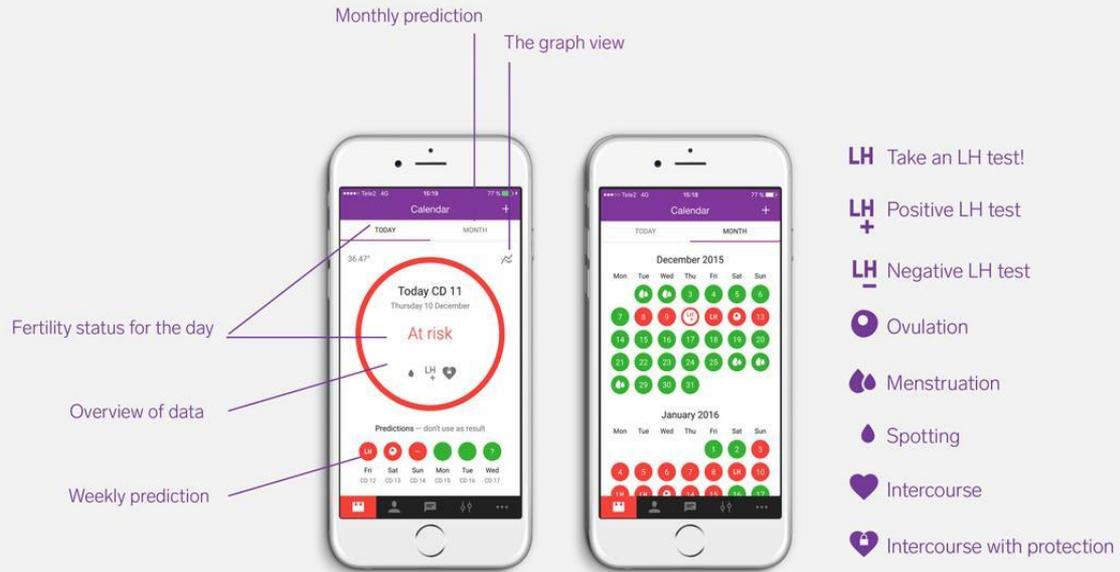
**DAY 29:** If the egg is not fertilized, hormone levels drop around this day, causing the lining of the uterus to be shed, which is known as menstruation. Yep, starting all over again.

# Foundation # 2 Cycle tracking

- Cycle apps (like Clue) vs. contraception apps (like Natural Cycles)
- There are multiple options for tracking your cycle as contraception
- Natural Cycles is the only app that is a certified medical device in the EU, backed by clinical research and assessment
- Natural Cycles: an algorithm that uses basal body temperature, sperm survival, temperature fluctuations and cycle irregularities

Clue

Natural Cycles

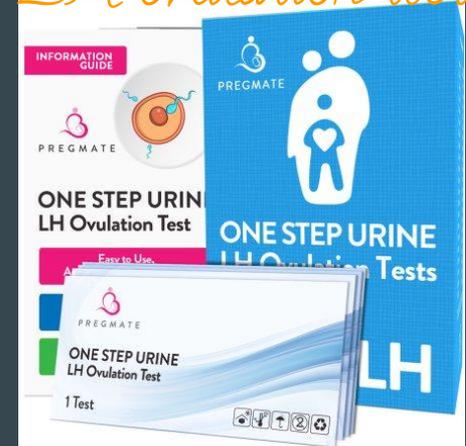


- LH Take an LH test!
- LH + Positive LH test
- LH - Negative LH test
- Ovulation
- ☾ Menstruation
- 💧 Spotting
- ♥ Intercourse
- ♥ Intercourse with protection

# Why it's Contraception How it Works

1. You measure your temperature under the tongue every morning when you wake up.
2. You enter any other important info such as menstruation, discharge, serious hangover (yes, this can affect your body temp), etc
3. An algorithm informs you if you have a “red day” or a “green day”, depending on whether there is a risk of pregnancy.
4. In order to prevent pregnancies, you need to use protection (or abstain from sex) on red days.
5. Users with fairly regular cycles, who enter temperature data 5 times or more per week, can expect to reach around 60% green days per cycle after 3 months of usage (i.e. no need for protection on these days).
6. Why it might not work that well for you?
  - a. Having recently quit hormonal contraception
  - b. Highly irregular cycles
  - c. Atypical fluctuating temperatures

## LH ovulation test



FERTILITY AWARENESS and CYCLE TRACKING are more than just pregnancy control

Knowledge is power

Our bodies are cyclical, knowledge allows us to balance

# FIX HORMONAL IMBALANCES THROUGH SELF CARE RITUALS

## SYMPTOM: Heavy, frequent bleeding

- For a few cycles, more frequently
- Or lasts longer
- Or abnormally heavy

### COMMON CULPRITS

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)  
Perimenopause  
A health condition or infection

## RESTORE BALANCE THROUGH SELF-CARE

- Reduce body fat & build strength through plant-based diet and daily movement
- Manage stress through meditation, massage, essential oils
- Herbs to take daily as a medicinal tea: vitex, black cohosh, raspberry leaf
- Abdominal massage
- Yoga

## SYMPTOM: Light, infrequent periods

- For a few cycles, less frequently or not at all
- Or very light, lasting less than 2 days
- Or irregular light spotting vs flow

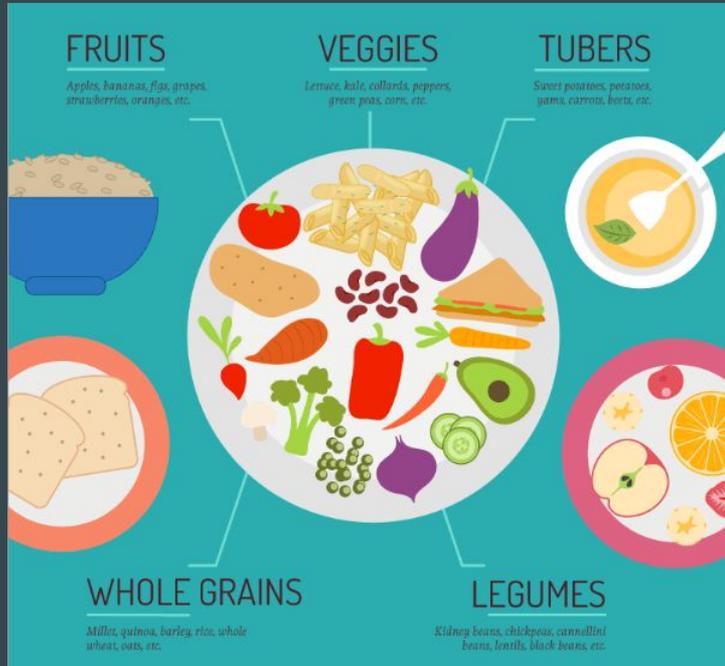
### COMMON CULPRITS

Low hormone levels  
Insufficient nourishment  
Early menopause

## RESTORE BALANCE THROUGH SELF-CARE

- Increase nutrition and strength through plant-based diet and daily movement
- Manage stress through meditation, massage, essential oils
- Sleep well. Aim for at least 7 1/2 hours
- Herbs to take daily as a medicinal tea: dong quai , vitex, raspberry leaf, skullcap
- Abdominal massage
- Yoga: During your period do forward bends to reduce tension on abdomen, boost circulation

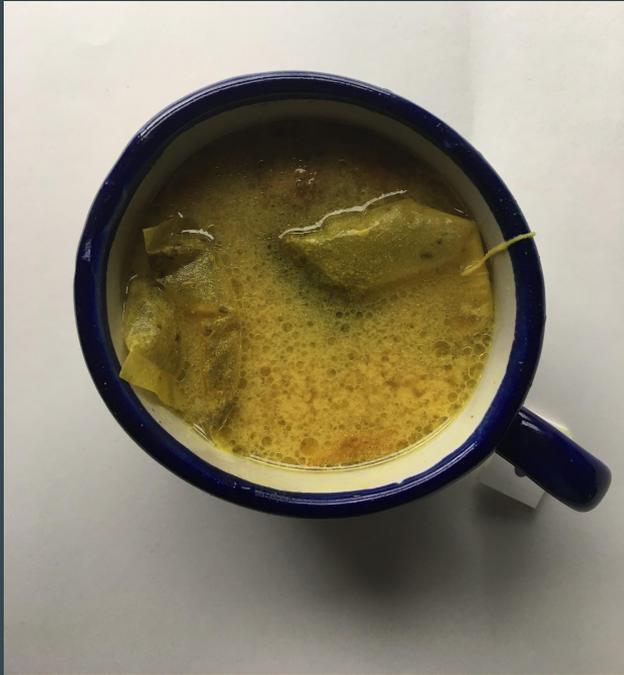
# Eating for a Healthy Cycle



1. **EAT PLANTS**  
fruits, vegetables, tubers, whole grains, legumes
2. **HEALTHY FATS ARE GOOD**  
shiny hair, glowing skin, digestion  
avocado, coconut, fish (omega 3s), olive oil
3. **EAT FERMENTED FOOD**  
enzymes, b-vitamins, Omega-3 fatty acids, probiotics  
kimchi, kombucha, tempeh, miso, natto, yogurt
4. **BE A KITCHEN OBGYN**  
maintain health + fix common maladies with food

# Natural Medicine for a Healthy Cycle

Drinks that make you feel good



## Tone your lady parts Tea

Good for hormone balance, digestion, liver, skin, kidneys, immune system

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon nettles
- 1 tablespoon raspberry leaf
- 1 tablespoon black cohosh
- 1-inch piece of ginger, sliced
- 1 teaspoon coconut oil
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 teaspoon turmeric (fresh is you can get it- try west indian markets, Whole Foods, or Windfall Farms at union sq farmer's market)

### PREPARATION

- Put it all in a small pot, (herbs can be loose like soup or in an infuser)
- Add 2 cups water, bring to a light simmer
- Let sit and steep for 60-minutes
- Heat 1 cup almond or nut milk
- Strain your tea and add almond milk
- Stir, sip all day

# Herbs

## INSIDE

### 3 ways to take herbs:

#### TEA or INFUSION

Teas and infusions are made by steeping flower & leaf herbs in a covered vessel of hot freshly boiled water. So easy!

For hard, woody herbs, a *decoction* is made by a prolonged cooking method resulting in what the Chinese call a tang or "soup." Heavier substances, including hard roots, branches and minerals are boiled (decocted) specifically to extract their deeper constituents.

#### POWDERS + PILLS

Powders are either made into a paste and mixed with water to make a tonic/tea; or put into pill capsules to consume. Pills are the least effective way to take herbs as they are harder to assimilate – best for bitter herbs.

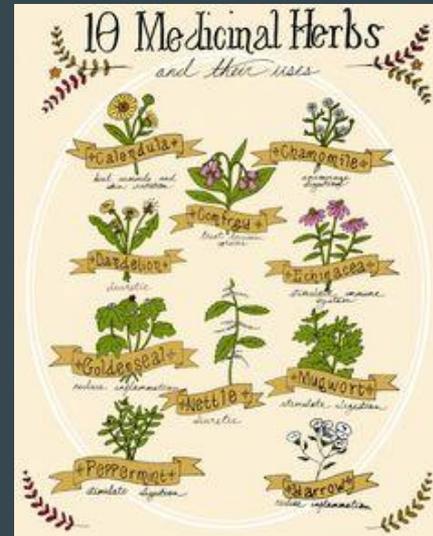
#### TINCTURE

Soaking an herb in alcohol, vinegar, or glycerine yields extracts and this method is called "simplic." They're easy to make and to take!

## A Woman's Healing Herbs

<b>Ginger</b> (ZINGIBER OFFICINALE) Root  EMENAGOQUE ANTI-SPASMODIC ANTI-INFLAMMATORY Morning Sickness Missed Periods Indigestion  Avoid high doses during pregnancy	<b>Vervain</b> (VERBENA OFFICINALIS) Leaves & Flowers NERVE TONIC ANTI-SPASMODIC RELAXANT  Migraine Anxiety Depression Menstrual Cramps Avoid in Pregnancy	<b>Marigold</b> (CALENDULA OFFICINALIS) Flowers ANTI-FUNGAL HEALING EMENAGOQUE Thrush Soreness in Breast-feeding Delayed Periods  Avoid in Pregnancy	<b>Chinese Angelica</b> (ANGELICA SINENSIS) Dried Root Dang Gui  EMENAGOQUE ANTI-SPASMODIC TONIC Painful or Missed Periods Avoid high doses in pregnancy and if DIABETIC Fresh roots are poisonous.	<b>Chamomile</b> (MATICARIA CHAMOMILLA) Flowers ANTI-SPASMODIC CALMING SEDATIVE ANTI-FUNGAL Thrush Anxiety Insomnia Menstrual Cramps  Avoid in pregnancy (except during labour) DO NOT USE IN HIGH DOSES Most used herbal HRT alternative in Germany	<b>Black Cohosh</b> (MILICIFUGA RACEMOSA) Roots & Rhizome  ANTI-SPASMODIC TONIC HORMONE BALANCER Menstrual Cramps Menopause Contractions Avoid in pregnancy (except during labour) DO NOT USE IN HIGH DOSES Most used herbal HRT alternative in Germany
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*Calendula*  
*Chamomile*  
*Comfrey*  
*Echinacea*  
*Dandelion*  
*Goldenseal*  
*Nettles*  
*Mugwort*  
*Peppermint*  
*Yarrow*



# Getting to the Root of Hormone Imbalances

## CAUSES

Insulin resistance (high blood sugar) >>> changes the way ovaries secrete hormones >>> irregular hormone levels

## REACTIONS

Menstrual Irregularities :: such as long, heavy periods, irregular, infrequent, or no periods at all (amenorrhea)  
>>> can lead to fertility issues

Hormonal imbalance :: such as elevated insulin, excess estrogen or androgens (male hormones)  
>>> can lead to high blood sugar, facial hair growth, acne, weight gain, spotting, ovarian cysts, uterine fibroids, endometriosis, etc

## FIXES

Limit carbohydrates/sugar

Exercise

Treat chronic inflammation (herbs, diet, stress reduction)

Improve gut health (herbs, diet, stress reduction)

Manage stress

## *Part II :: Daily Rituals for a Healthy Cycle*

TO FEEL GOOD AND FORTIFY YOUR INNER + OUTER SELF

- Yoga asana (including digestive series, sun salutes, restorative sequences or other practices)
- Stretching
- Self massage and oiling (whole body or just a focus area)
- Exercise/Activity
- Communing with nature (like, sitting outside on your stoop while drinking tea, listening to the birds)
- Journaling
- Taking daily herbs
- Meditating
- Visioning
- Praying
- Reading that builds awareness of self
- Pranayama (controlled breathing)
- Upashaya (drinking hot water with lemon and honey)
- Sipping on herbal tea
- Chanting
- Gratitude exercises
- Listening to guided meditation
- Sitting in silence and reflecting

# *Laena's Self-Care Rituals*

## Morning

- 13-minute yoga detox sequence (interrupted by toddler climbing on my back)
- **Make a green drink**
- Drink a healthy tonic, like my “digestive aid”
- At least 60 minutes of physical activity: this includes yoga, gym, walking to work, chasing kid, etc

## All the time

- 5-minute meditation “I breathe in, I breathe out”

## Before Bed

- Self massage and oiling with my herbal-infused oils (whole body or just a focus area)
- Gratitude exercises, aspirations and reflection
- Listening to guided meditation
- Sitting in silence and reflecting

# Mindfulness Meditation

help relieve stress : treat heart disease : lower blood pressure : reduce chronic pain : improve sleep

alleviate gastrointestinal issues : treat depression + anxiety : become stronger inside : be resilient

*I breathe in,  
I breathe out*

## DAILY PRACTICE

- As you breathe in, think, “I breathe in” and picture your body filling with warm light and good juju
- As you breathe out, think, “I breathe out” and smile as you exhale, feeling all tension and bad juju leaving your body
- Do this for 2 minutes, 5 minutes, an hour = whatever you can and wherever to relax and release stress
- Over time, your body learns how to do this quickly and efficiently
- You are training yourself to relax and strengthen your mind + body = be resilient

# 15 Mend Me Minutes

## 5 minutes of self massage

feels good, boosts circulation, relaxes, eases stress and anxiety

## 5 minutes of stretching

Feels good, boosts circulation, strengthens, raises heart rate, relaxes, eases stress /anxiety

## 5 minutes of meditation

Retain brain-function/focus, build inner strength, ease stress +anxiety, be resilient

# Love Letter to Myself

1. Something you are grateful for, right now
2. Something you love about yourself
3. A self-care healthy cycle promise

*Thank You*

For more self-care: [laenamira.com](https://laenamira.com)  
Private sessions: [laena@laenamira.com](mailto:laena@laenamira.com)