

CHARTING PATTERNS

Have you ever thought about the impact that your menstrual cycle has on your physical and emotional state? Have you ever been anxious, joyful, tearful, sensitive, psychic, or bloated, and wondered what was happening, only to get your period a few days later? Many women are amazed at the many things they discover when they chart their cycles, especially when their chart covers many different aspects of life over the month. Note the aspects of your life that seem most important to how you feel, such as mood, stress levels, exercise, food cravings, sexuality, etc. (see sample chart). Include factors and activities related to your Personal Health Concern Project.

Charting can reveal to you a lot more than what days you were bleeding, and can reveal significant patterns even if you're not bleeding (pregnant, post-menopausal, post-hysterectomy, irregular, amenorrheic, transexual, etc.) Look for patterns between health habits, mood, stress, sleep, exercise, etc. Menstruating women can note length and amount of bleeding, type of cervical discharges to identify ovulation and fertility, try remedies for menstrual discomforts and note which ones work best. Perimenopausal women can note symptoms of changing hormones and effectiveness of remedies for menopausal discomforts. Women on birth control pills may notice fewer cyclical patterns but see other cause and effect relationships; likewise for women on hormonal contraception that results in erratic bleeding. Women of many different ages and situations in Women's Health classes report new insights into themselves from monthly charting.

Although our lives can seem chaotic at times, there are underlying patterns in effect. When we can see and understand these patterns, we can work with our body, mind and spirit as well as the outside world for healthier and more harmonious lives. Understanding patterns in our life helps us manage stress, because we gain the perception of control that is a major factor in stress reduction. Charting aspects of our physical and emotional health can reveal cause and effect relationships like: lack of exercise & insomnia or anxiety & too much coffee; hormonal links like menstruating two weeks after ovulating or stress & hot flashes; or relationships with outside factors like worry before payday, or happiness after great sex with someone you love (which affects you hormonally, physically, emotionally, and might turn out to be your best menstrual cramp remedy!) Have fun with your charting, and every month look for patterns between the aspects you chart, and add or drop factors that seem significant to you.

Turn in your monthly charts with a typed page on what you discovered from charting, patterns noticed, remedies tried, what worked, changes you made based on what you learned, how you used this information when doing your Personal Health Concern Project, etc. Include an additional paragraph on doing a Breast Self-Exam (BSE), which will be assigned when we discuss breast health later in the semester. Consult class schedule for due date.