

– Workshop Proposal –

# Unlocking the Menstrual Cycle: Enhancing Performance and Well-Being for Circus Artists

If you've ever wondered what is happening with your body on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis, how it affects your training and performance, or how to support your menstruating friends or students effectively, this workshop is for you.

We want to help you understand the highs and lows of YOUR cycle, enabling you to adjust your training and take meaningful steps toward managing your mental and physical health more effectively. By understanding and working with menstrual cycles, you can manage injury risks, enhance recovery, achieve training goals faster, and improve your relationship with your body and your creative processes.

In our workshop, you'll gain practical tools and knowledge to take charge of your long term health and career. We aim to help you boost your performance and advocate for yourself and others in the circus and performing arts community. Together, we will discuss how to communicate these needs to trainers, coaches, and peers, fostering a more supportive and understanding environment.

## Goals

Participants will deepen their understanding of general anatomical and physiological differences between menstruating and non-menstruating bodies that are important to consider in circus training and practice.

The participants will be equipped with practical tools to help understand their individual cycle and recognize their cycle-related symptoms and/or be able to share those tools with peers and colleagues.

Through group discussion, the participants will reflect on current obstacles and challenges menstruating bodies face in the (pre-)professional circus field and propose further steps to tackle these.

They will receive a workshop manual with reference materials to continue their own investigation on their menstrual cycle after the workshop.

## Background:

As part of my Circus studies at Codarts, I did research on menstruation with a view to improving the health and training of those with a monthly cycle. It's important to point out that this is a text for everyone, whether you'll never menstruate in your life, you are done menstruating, or you will menstruate in the future. That's because we all walk on the same planet, we work in the same companies, we perform on the same stages. We work and we live together, yet we don't talk about that thing. Our avoidance needs to change.

Why? There is a moderate-to-big knowledge gap about the menstrual cycle, not only in the Circus community, but in society generally. This knowledge gap, similarly, has consequences across the spectrum. It limits opportunities to have a long and healthy career as a menstruating Circus artist, and jeopardizes people's ability to live a sustainable and healthy life altogether.

My research made apparent the lack of open discussions about menstrual cycles and their impact on training. What are the long-term health implications of the menstrual cycle for performers? As the literature is scant, I compiled data on essential aspects of athletes' and performers' health with regard to menstruation, seeing this as a first step toward fostering a more informed and supportive Circus community. The underrepresentation of women in sports science studies, of which only 6-8% focus on women, hinders a holistic understanding of factors influencing performance, training, and recovery. Clearly, there are many missed opportunities to enhance performance and well-being for menstruating athletes. A shift towards inclusive sports science research is long overdue, and entails recognizing the many unique issues that menstrual cycles pose for athletes and performers.

Cycle-syncing approaches have been developed to harness fluctuations in energy and mood that accompany different menstrual cycle phases. For athletes, it can be essential to adopt these methods and to embrace the importance of being well informed about the physiological and psychological patterns at play in the menstrual cycle to ensure a safe and optimized training.

Therefore, we make it our mission to educate about training approaches that consider menstrual health, promoting acceptance and understanding of cyclical bodies in the circus and performing arts.

We aim to empower individuals with knowledge about their bodies, enabling them to manage their individual physical and mental health effectively while fostering a supportive and informed community within the circus arts.

Additionally, we seek to educate participants about the long-term effects of the absence of menstrual cycles on career longevity and overall health, offering insights into managing training expectations and mental states throughout the menstrual cycle.

# Practicalities

## Target Group:

We would like to welcome minimum 15, maximum 35 participants from one or more of the following groups:

- Artists, students, coaches, directors etc. of circus, dance, or similar disciplines
- Circus, dance, or similar discipline practitioners, semi-professional or professional training (20+ hours per week), interested in better understanding and respecting the body's capacities.
- Those who experience menstrual cycles or work in circus contexts closely with individuals who do.

***NOTE: You don't need to experience menstrual cycles yourself in order to participate***

## Language:

The workshop will be held in English. Materials and sources are available in English. We can provide translation or sources in different languages on request.

## Format and Length:

The workshop is theory based, includes lecture based sessions as well as group discussions and wants to invite the participants to contribute with questions, ideas, critique, feedback.

The educational aspect relies on lecture based formats. In the *Lab* section the participants will be split into smaller groups based on their interest with topics such as 'discipline-specific symptoms and how to approach them', 'what is needed in education', 'communication between teachers and students', etc. There they will discuss questions, collect ideas that they will collect on paper or a digital alternative to share with the bigger group.

The results of the workshop will be available for all participants after the workshop together with a booklet with the theoretical background information.

## Disclaimer:

This workshop aims to create a safe and inclusive space where participants of all backgrounds and genders can express themselves, be heard, and communicate respectfully.

Discriminative comments or actions will be addressed, and if repeated, measures will be taken to protect other participants.

For questions or special needs, please contact the organizer at least 5 days in advance or as early as possible.