

Introduction

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1.7 billion people on this planet menstruate.

That means that 4.2 million of them are having their periods right now.¹

More than 80 percent of them suffer from significant and life-interrupting premenstrual syndrome and cramping.²

That is a really big deal for women and their health—so it's shocking that no one seems to be talking about it.

Until now.

If you are one of the 3.4 million women who are suffering every month, if your sister, friend, or daughter suffers, or if you're a partner of someone who is suffering, this book is for you.

Your menstrual cycle is a barometer of your health, and while I will teach you how to improve your period—and use your cycle as a diagnostic tool for your overall health—this book isn't really just a period fix-it book. It is an exploration of a world where women are filled with so much shame about their periods that they've suffered in silence for century after century. It is also

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about the impact it is having on both the quality of our lives and our access to power and freedom. Once you understand how this deeply rooted and systemic stigma affects us even today, I'll move on to helping you better understand your cycle and how to optimize it. Last, we look at what we, as menstruating people, can do as a community to liberate ourselves and others from the shame, stigma, and suffering of menstrual cycles so that we can reclaim our bodies, our health, and our identities and take over the world.

About Language

You will notice I shift back and forth between the terms *women* and *people with periods* (PWP). This may seem unusual and even awkward, but I feel it's incredibly important to recognize that not every person who has a period identifies as a woman, and also that not every woman menstruates. Sometimes I will use the term *women* because I'm speaking of the struggles of those who historically have been identified as women, and situations unique to that group. But never do I intend to be exclusionary. I use the acronym PWP frequently because I want this book to be part of a new vernacular of inclusivity, diversity, and acceptance.

About My Point of View

I was trained in both Western medicine and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). I earned a master's degree in traditional Chinese medicine from the Academy of Oriental Medicine in Austin, Texas, where, alongside four years of coursework in acupuncture

and herbal medicine, I also studied biochemistry, organic chemistry, reproductive physiology, and pathophysiology. I worked hand in hand with a reproductive endocrinologist developing and implementing strategies to optimize fertility outcomes. In fact, Reproductive Medical Associates (RMA) of Texas, a very well-known IVF center, had a clinic inside my Austin clinic. During my twenty-year clinical career working with women's reproductive health, I was fascinated by what real integrative medicine could look like in practice. I wanted to explore what happens when you combine the best of every clinical solution as a new system to significantly improve women's overall health instead of just focusing on one symptom with one intervention. Based on my experience, I developed my own version of integrative medicine that uses a diagnostic algorithm to combine a woman's symptoms, menstrual cycle characteristics, basal body temperatures, and habits to create customized interventions that allow me to get to the root of the problem and stop focusing on symptoms. This new paradigm borrowed from the best of many disciplines, like Western medicine, Chinese medicine, behavior science, nutrition, mind/body, and, ultimately, technology, and with it I realized that the way to improve any health problem is to diagnose and understand the relationship between all of the signs and symptoms and then attack them from every discipline. As you are reading, note that some of the ways I talk about physiological functions and methods of understanding the body may be different from conventional thinking and that they come from both my vast clinical experience and peer-reviewed data, so although they may be novel, they are not fabricated.

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It is time for a paradigm shift around the thinking about women's health. How we are currently taking care of women and their health isn't working, so we have to be open to a new way of approaching our health in order to transcend a system that is disease and drug focused. Both of those elements play important roles in our medical system, but if 80 percent of women are sick each month, what we are doing needs a *huge* revision.

This book is the brainchild of the more than twenty years as a clinician in which I have had the distinct pleasure of improving the cycles and fertility of thousands of women. Whenever I tell women the kind of information I've included in this book, they almost always say the same thing:

Why doesn't every woman (or PWP) know this?

Now they can.