

WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT *seed cycling?*

We've got the lowdown on the hot women's wellness trend that promises to balance your hormones

Wondering why everyone on Instagram is sprinkling seeds over their smoothies and salads? They're probably seed cycling. Although it picked up serious traction in the wellness world last year, Google searches for the trend — which involves eating linseeds, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds and sunflower seeds at different points in your menstrual cycle — have started to explode.

"Seed cycling comes from the movement of using food as medicine," explains Elizabeth Cullen, Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioner and founder of The Dao Health Clinic. "It aims to support the two phases of the menstrual cycle — the follicular and the luteal phase — using the nutritional benefits of certain seeds and aims to promote hormonal balance in the female body."

Said to do everything from regulating your periods to reducing the symptoms of PMS, seed cycling has also become a way for women to take control of their health, notes nutritionist and naturopath Belinda Kirkpatrick. "Women are starting to learn more about their bodies and appreciate that their period can act like a barometer for their health," she says. "Hormonal health is one of the hottest trending topics of our time, and seed cycling is a do-it-at-home practice anyone can do, which is very appealing — particularly when some women experience big results from such a simple practice."

WHAT IS IT?

To really wrap your head around what seed cycling does — and doesn't — do, you need to understand your menstrual cycle. During the follicular phase (which begins on the first day of your period and lasts until ovulation), your oestrogen levels increase. After ovulation, the second half of your cycle — known as the luteal phase — begins, and this is when the hormone progesterone rises. "If there's an imbalance between oestrogen and progesterone, you may experience symptoms like cramps, acne and fluid retention or irregular and heavy periods," explains Kirkpatrick — and this is where seed cycling comes in.

PHASE 1 (linseeds and pumpkin seeds)

To support the first half of your cycle, seed cycling advocates recommend taking one

tablespoon of ground linseeds (also known as flaxseeds) and one tablespoon of ground pumpkin seeds a day. "These seeds encourage oestrogen production," says Cullen. "Linseeds are high in omega-3 fats, which support the regulation of follicle-stimulating hormones, and they're also a plant-based source of phytoestrogens. Lignans (a type of fibre) help to regulate oestrogen within the body," she adds. Pumpkin seeds are rich in zinc, a key player in healthy ovulation, and it can also assist with progesterone as you transition into the luteal phase.

PHASE 2 (sesame and sunflower seeds)

"After ovulation, you switch to taking one tablespoon of ground sesame seeds and one tablespoon of ground sunflower seeds to support the production of progesterone," Kirkpatrick says. Rich in lignans (a type of polyphenol found in plants), sesame seeds help block excess oestrogen and the selenium in sunflower seeds helps your liver remove unwanted hormones from the body.

If you're not a fan of ground seeds, you can eat them whole, however grinding them will release more of their nutrients into your body.

MENOPAUSE

Seed cycling isn't only good for regulating menstrual cycles. According to Kirkpatrick, it may also provide support during menopause. "Your oestrogen levels drop when you stop ovulating, but seed cycling during post-menopause can give them a boost," she says. "The seeds are full of good fats and fibre, which is good for general health, and they also contain phytoestrogens that can bind to receptors and act like a mild form of oestrogen." Since a lack of oestrogen can result in symptoms such as dry skin, vaginal dryness and low bone density, any amount of oestrogen during menopause can help.



SHOULD YOU TRY IT?

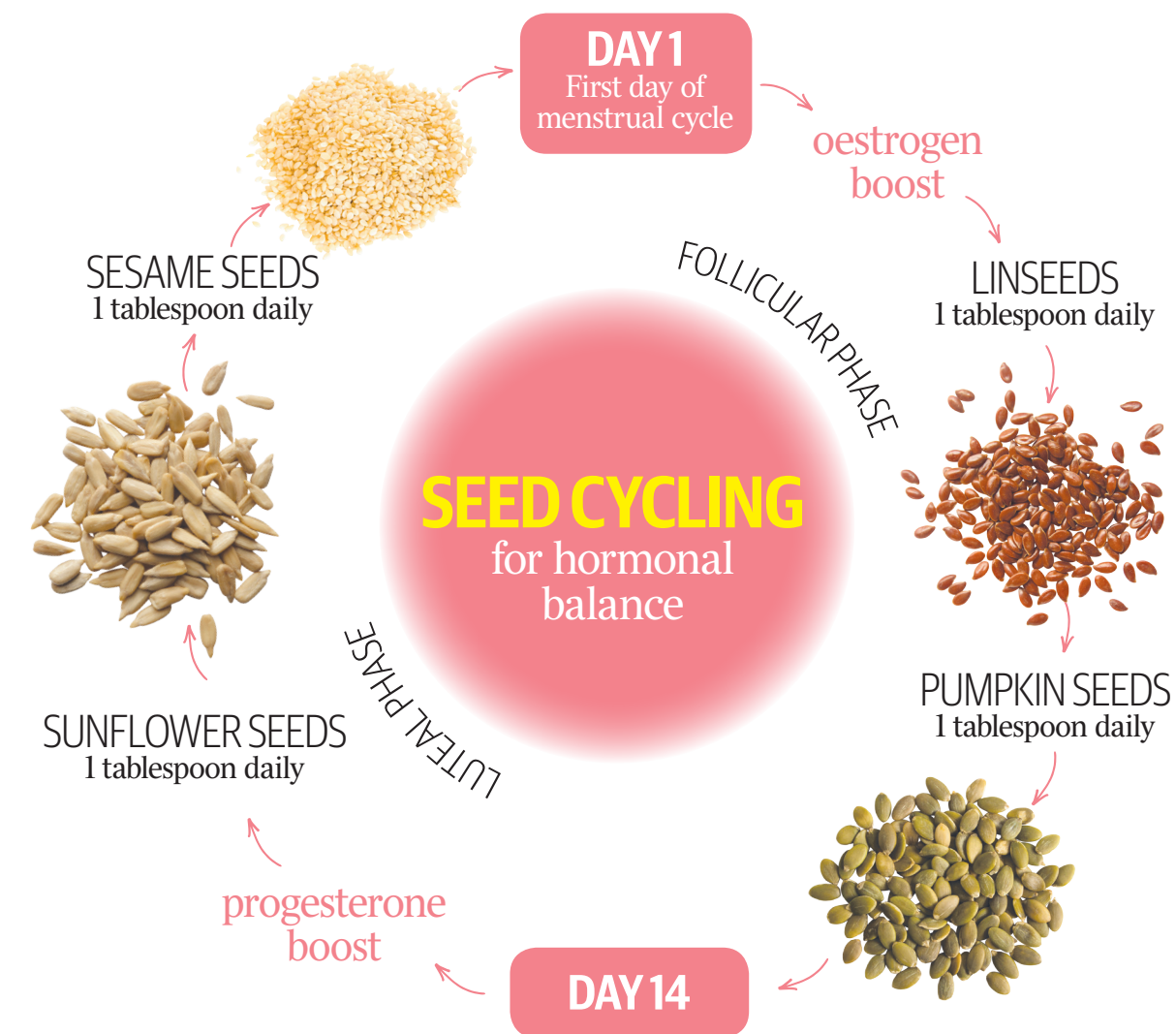
Although there haven't yet been a great number of studies on the benefits of seed cycling, both Kirkpatrick and Cullen agree that adding seeds to your diet won't cause any harm (unless, of course, you have a seed allergy, in which case you should give the trend a miss).

"Not only can seed cycling help minimise hormonally driven symptoms such as painful periods, premenstrual tension and irregular cycles, it's also a great way to incorporate nutritious seeds into your diet," says Cullen. "Since this is a very gentle approach to supporting hormonal balance, patience is key, so I recommend a minimum trial of three months."

"By eating certain seeds at certain times of the month, you're less likely to get sick of them and it helps you to be more consistent," Kirkpatrick adds.

However, seed cycling shouldn't be used as a way to treat serious issues such as infertility, Kirkpatrick states. She also notes that simply eating a variety of seeds regularly will give your body a big health boost and support hormone balance.

"All of the seeds contain omega-3 fats, which are anti-inflammatory and support healthy hormone development," Kirkpatrick explains. They also have a great amount of fibre, which helps excrete excess oestrogen (the main culprit behind your painful menstrual symptoms) out of your body.



READY TO GET STARTED?

Over the next three pages, learn how to balance your hormones, up your fibre intake and improve your overall health with these seed-packed recipes by Belinda Kirkpatrick and Ainsley Johnstone



TOPPING IDEAS

Just before serving, add a handful of raspberries and 3-4 Brazil nuts, coarsely chopped; slice a peach, roughly chop 5-6 toasted almonds and add 1 tbs of toasted pumpkin seeds; or stir in 1 tbs of shredded coconut and top with sliced banana, 5-6 chopped cashews and the grated zest of half a lime.

Breakfast YOGHURT POTS

"These are hands-down the easiest breakfast food to make in advance and set yourself up for the week ahead," says Kirkpatrick. "They contain the perfect blend of protein, 'good' fats and something fresh and can also be made into a snack size for between meals. Look for a natural yoghurt that does not contain any added sugar in the ingredient list. If you are used to sweet yoghurts, try preparing these in advance and top with frozen raspberries or fresh passionfruit, which will blend through and sweeten the yoghurt. If your diet is dairy free, try them with a coconut yoghurt, and if you're seed cycling, swap the LSA for ground pumpkin and linseeds to support the follicular phase of your period, and use ground sunflower and sesame seeds during the luteal phase."

MAKES 1 POT

¾ cup plain or Greek-style yoghurt
1 tbs chia seeds
1 tsp vanilla paste
1 tbs LSA (linseed, sunflower seed and almond meal)

Stir together all of the ingredients and leave in the fridge for at least 15 minutes.



Lunch
SEED CRACKERS

“Sometimes you just need something crunchy to eat! These crackers are great to have on hand for an easy, satisfying lunch, or to serve with soup. The linseeds are excellent for those with PCOS as they help to keep blood-sugar levels stable with their unique combination of fibre, ‘good’ fats and protein,” Kirkpatrick explains. “They’re perfect to eat at any point in your cycle as they contain a combination of seeds to support a healthy hormone balance and don’t worry if a few crumbs break off, just use them to scatter onto other food. Keep any leftover toasted seeds in a container ready to put on salads and soups.”

MAKES 10

- 1 cup linseeds
- ⅓ cup mixed sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, chia seeds and sesame seeds
- 3 tbs almond meal
- 2 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- Olive oil spray, for greasing

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Line a baking tray with baking paper. Combine all the ingredients in a bowl with 1¼ cups of water and stir. Set aside for 15 minutes.

Spray the baking tray with olive oil spray and press the mixture evenly onto the tray to about 5mm thick. Use a knife to cut the mixture into 10 rectangles; that way they will be easy to cut when they are cooked.

Bake for 30 minutes. Take the tray out of the oven and cut along the lines again. Return to the oven and bake for a further 20 minutes.

Cool the crackers on the tray, then break along the lines and store in an airtight container for 1 month.

“These crackers are great to take with you for a nutritious lunch. Enjoy them with dips, chopped macadamias, jalapeños, sashimi-grade tuna, coriander, smoked salmon, avocado, walnuts, fetta cheese, lemon, chicken, cucumber, cashews, mint, hummus, cherry tomatoes, black olives or dukkah”



Dinner
COLESLAW WITH CHICKEN & AVOCADO DRESSING

“This coleslaw is a must for anyone with symptoms of relative oestrogen excess such as fluid retention, weight gain, moodiness, endometriosis or subfertility,” advises Kirkpatrick. “The cabbage and radish contain diindolylmethane, which helps to remove excess oestrogen through the liver. For support during the follicular phase, swap sunflower seeds for flaxseeds, and during the luteal phase, trade the pumpkin seeds for sesame.”

SERVES 2

- 500g chicken breast
- 270ml coconut cream
- 2 cups finely shredded Chinese cabbage
- 1 cup finely shredded red cabbage
- 1 cup finely shredded fennel
- ¼ cup chopped dill
- ¼ cup chopped flat-leaf (Italian) parsley
- 2 radishes, julienned
- 1 tbs toasted sunflower seeds
- 1 tbs toasted buckwheat groats
- 1 tbs toasted pumpkin seeds
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

- FOR THE AVOCADO DRESSING
- ¼ cup cashews
 - ½ avocado
 - 2 tbs lemon juice
 - 1 tbs olive oil
 - 1 tbs tahini
 - 1 tbs caramelised red wine vinegar

Put the chicken breast in a saucepan and add the coconut cream. Top up with water so the chicken is completely covered with liquid. Bring to the boil, then reduce to a simmer and cook for 12–15 minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Leave the chicken to rest in the liquid for 5 minutes, then remove and thinly slice or shred with a fork.

In a separate bowl, combine both types of cabbage with the fennel, dill and parsley. Toss to combine and divide between 2 bowls. Top with the shredded chicken, radish, sunflower seeds, buckwheat groats and pumpkin seeds, and season with salt and pepper.

To make the dressing, place the cashews in a bowl, cover with hot water and soak for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, put the avocado, lemon juice, oil, tahini and red wine vinegar in a food processor. Season with salt and pepper and add ⅓ cup of water. After cashews have cooled, drain and add to other ingredients. Blitz until smooth and drizzle over salad.