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Intro: Hey friends! Welcome to Girls Night. I'm Stephanie May Wilson and I am so happy that you're here. Each week I have a girlfriend over and we talk through one of the biggest questions we have about our lives as women.

We're talking about friendships and faith and relationships and self-confidence, about our calling in life, and how to live every bit of our lives to the full. Life is so much better and easier and absolutely more fun when we navigate it together as girlfriends. And I cannot wait to get started.

Friends, I'm so excited about today's episode. This is such an important one. Today, we're talking all about our periods. We're excited about this episode, because if you're anything like me, you don't spend a whole lot of time learning about your period. You're pretty sure you know the basics. After all, you've lived with it for years now. It's a normal part of your life.

But also, if you're anything like me, there are some hard parts about your period that actually negatively impact your quality of life. Maybe you have terrible cramps, or really bad PMS, or maybe your period is really irregular or super painful. But it's always been that way, so you've just sort of tried to accept it.

That's how I've been for years. I've been frustrated by my period, had issues with my period, and just overall hated this time of the month. But I honestly just didn't know there was a different way. If you can relate to any of those things, I'm so excited for you to hear this conversation.

Our guest for today's episode is Berrion Berry. Berri is a menstrual health educator, a practitioner, and the creator of Optimize Your Flo. In this episode, she's teaching us everything we never learned about our periods, things I wish I knew so much sooner. We're talking about alleviating pain, navigating our hormonal shifts and so much more.

You guys, I learned so much in this episode. There were things that I have always done that I learned I should not be doing. There are ways of embracing changes in our hormones throughout the month that is totally revolutionized the way that I view my period and honestly the way that I live. This was such a good conversation. So make sure to put on your coziest sweatpants, grab a pen and a piece of paper because you do not want to miss out on any of this.

But really quickly before we dive in, speaking of periods, I don't know about you but I want to be as comfortable as humanly possible during my time in the month.

So that means wearing sweatpants and coziest sweatshirt in my closet which just so happens to be my Girls Night signature sweatshirt.

We created the original My Favorite Night is Girls Night sweatshirt shortly after the Girls Night podcast launched in 2017. And little did we know we've just created a total fan favorite. Since then our signature Girls Night sweatshirt has become the unofficial uniform of Girls Nights all over the world.

We've received countless photos from women as they cozy up in their sweatshirts and gathered together with their girlfriends. And it is so much fun to see so many women both representing the podcast but even more celebrating the true magic that happens when we come together as women.

Our Girls Night sweatshirts are so soft. And if you're anything like me and all of my friends, you'll find yourself wearing yours constantly. If you haven't gotten a Girls Night sweatshirt of your own, just go to Stephaniemaywilson.com and hit the tab that says "shop." Again that Stephaniemaywilson.com and just hit the tab that says "shop."

With that said let's jump into the episode. Here's my conversation with Berri.

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Stephanie: Friends, I am so excited for who I get to introduce you to today. I'm sitting here with my new friend, Berrion Berry. Berri, thanks so much for being here on Girls Night.

Berrion: Thank you so much for having me, Stephanie. I am so excited to chat with the girls. I hope it's okay that I call them that because that's my vibe.

Stephanie: That is who we are. We are sweatpants, we are eating pizza straight out of the box. We are talking about the big things, the little things, literally every bit of our lives. I'm so excited to talk about this because I can't believe we haven't done a Girls Night about this topic. Because this is something that we all deal with and something that I think we all are kind of clueless on. I mean, we're half clueless. We know enough to get by but not maybe enough to thrive. So I just am so excited about this.

So before we dive in, tell us who you are, what you do, and a fun fact about yourself.

Berrion: So my name is Berrion Berry, as you have already stated, but I go by Berri. I am a menstrual health practitioner and educator. But I love to tell people that I'm really

your period-loving bestie. That's just my energy. I want to make periods really fun and digestible and inviting and not painful. That's what I do. It's who I serve. I utilize cycle syncing as a means to an end.

And a fun fact about me is that I actually speak two other languages, arguably three. But I actually speak German fluently. I'm conversationally fluent in Arabic. A little bit, enough to get me by if I need to, and sarcasm. It is my thing.

Stephanie: How did you become fluent in German?

Berrion: I started studying German when I was in the sixth grade, and then when I went on to university, it was actually one of those things that I also majored in. I did a lot of unconventional study prior to leading me to this unconventional path. And here we are.

Stephanie: I love that so much. That's actually the same for me, but with Spanish. I started studying Spanish when I was 10 and took it all the way through school, studied abroad in Spain a couple times. It would have been my minor if my school offered Spanish as a minor. They just didn't. They didn't offer it. I actually have a minor in French though because I just love languages. I love that. I love that you do German and Arabic. Those are not easy.

Berrion: So a little bit of the motive behind it. I really wanted to go into diplomacy work and I wanted to work in women's health and women's rights. And then it just didn't happen, which is totally fine because I'm still full circle working in women's health and women's rights, teaching about periods.

But every now and again, I get to speak a little bit of German or speak a little bit of Arabic, and I get to serve in a different capacity. Especially when people find out... I have a lot of German clients from German-speaking countries, oddly enough, or I've had people in my programs from like Dubai, and they're like, "You speak Arabic?" And I'm like, "It's terrible but yes." So it's really fun to be able to lean on.

Stephanie: I love that so much. What an awesome fun fact! That is so good. Well, we know that this is your background, how did you get into teaching about periods? Where did that come from?

Berrion: I'm going to give you the short and sweet of it because I'm long-winded. I really am. So here's the thing. The short and sweet of it is essentially in 2019, I was interviewing a friend for my podcast. And at this time, I was hating my corporate job. I was also a certified functional nutritionist and personal trainer.

And on the podcast, my friend Hannah goes, "Yeah, periods aren't supposed to be painful." And I was like, "What? Like, "Mm-mm." I've spent 14 years hating my period, being in agonizing pain, and you were the first person that ever heard say periods aren't supposed to be painful."

From that day forward, I kid you not, it was a mission and a commitment to fix my own period first. That's what I was mostly concerned with. But then I realized how many other people experience so much pain and discomfort. From there, I just started normalizing the conversation around menstruation.

Fast forward to 2020, I was spotlighted almost every other place talking about periods and cycle syncing. And here we are. 2021 was a whirlwind of a year. I'm on national television talking to doctors and being like, "Yeah, periods are supposed to be painful." And they're like, "We're doctors. Wait, what?" And I'm like, "See, this is the problem. This is the problem right here." I mean, in 2022, this is kind of what we do now.

Stephanie: That is amazing. That is amazing. I have so many questions because I know that everyone who's listening I feel like we come from a couple different places. I have friends who are throwing up every time that they have their period. Like they are sick. Like home from work for several days every single month because of it because it's so brutal. I think for others of us we all have embarrassing stories or it's just incredible inconvenience.

I know for me, for years and years and years, it was really hard on me hormonally. So I felt like I was a different person for a week out of the month. And that was really hard on my relationships. I don't know, I think there are very few of us who are like, "I am at peace with my period." Most of us are like, "If it went away, I would be thrilled."

So all that to say, like I said at the beginning, I think that we all know enough to get by, but maybe not a ton about our periods. So let's start there. Can you tell us what is period? Why do we have them? Why are they important? What can we expect? Just talk us through what is our period?

Berrion: Oh my gosh, okay, first, we just need to address the fact that all of us have probably experienced a problematic period. That's what I say to everybody. So listen up, friends, you're not alone. Even the Office of Women's Health validates that you're not alone with this.

But when you say, "Hey, Berri, what is a period? What do we need to know?" A period is literally the shedding of the uterine lining. That's the biology of it. It's when you're bleeding, right? But then we have our entire menstrual cycle, which is

all-encompassing of four phases, which I know we're going to delve into in a second. So just know a period is the bleeding. The menstrual cycle is the whole picture or the whole thing, 28 days, so on and so forth.

A normal period should be anywhere from three to seven days in length. Okay? Nothing more, nothing less. Your blood... We're going to get really graphic. I hope that's okay.

Stephanie: Yes, 100%.

Berrion: So the bleed should really be a bright red or a cherry red at max. It shouldn't be like pink, it shouldn't be purple, it shouldn't be orange or gray or brown. And yes, people do experience that array of colors, if you will.

And then in terms of the flow, your flow should really only be 80 milliliters or less for your entire period. So think changing your tampon three to five times a day. Now most people probably change it more than that because toxic shock syndrome has really scared all of us, I'm sure. So we're constantly changing it. But those are the basics and the parameters of a normal period.

Stephanie: Talk to me about how big of a tampon because I don't know how much 80 milliliters is. So if you're doing it three to five times a day, is it like-

Berrion: A regular tampon. I mean, I cast the net wide with this one. And the reason I say I cast it wide is because some people are like... Have you ever seen *Mean Girls-*

Stephanie: 100%.

Berrion: ...where she's like, "I can't help it that I have a wide-set vagina and a heavy flow." That's always what's in my head. But I like to cast the net a little bit wider with that because I might use a regular tampon, but you might use a super or super plus. So as long as it's three to five tampons a day.

For those of you who use a menstrual cup, this is emptying the cup two to three times a day. It can be in there for like 12 hours. So you don't have to change it as frequently as you're changing a tampon.

If you wear pads, again, we're changing the pad three to five times max. And each pad, each tampon holds a different level of absorbency. So I think it's important that we just say three to five, and then kind of adjust it for where you're at.

Stephanie: Okay, okay, so that just gives us a little bit of a range. It might be heavier, it might be lighter, but wherever on the spectrum you fall, three to five changes a day.

Berrion: Mm-hmm.

Stephanie: That makes sense. How serious is toxic shock? I think we're all really scared of it. And also I don't know what it is.

Berrion: It's a serious thing but I also think that it affects such a small amount of the population that it's hard to really speak into. So essentially toxic shock syndrome happens when you've had a tampon in for too long. So if you're wearing a tampon overnight, let me just say this very plainly. Stop. Don't do that. Switch over to period panties. I know, I know. You're like, "I don't want to feel the blood," right?

Stephanie: Wait, what? You don't wear a tampon all night?

Berrion: You don't want to. No.

Stephanie: Why?

Berrion: Because it's literally you want to free flow and just let it go. But the tampon itself can lead to the toxic shock if it's in for too long.

Stephanie: And how long is...? I thought it was like 12 hours.

Berrion: It shouldn't really be in for more than eight.

Stephanie: Oh my gosh, my mind is blown.

Berrion: If you're sleeping, let's say seven to eight hours, we don't necessarily want to have that in the body. I'm one of those girls who I personally loved wearing tampons and I didn't care. I'm not a pads person. Occasionally I'll share them or use them but I like my tampons. I like my cups. But the moment I switched over to period panties, my whole world changed.

Now you might be thinking, "Berri, you got to ease us into this." The panties... Your face right now is so grossed.

Stephanie: I love that we're recording the video. I am so intrigued. I'm so here for this but I just want you to know that you are blowing my mind right now. So keep going.

Berrion: I love that. So period panties are panties that are literally designed to bleed in. They're designed for you to... like the blood is supposed to be absorbed through the different types of technology. So different brands use different technology. Essentially, that's what they call it. It's literally just absorbency.

It's not super thick, either. So imagine if you were wearing a pad, that pad is built into your underwear and you don't leak through. And there's like different levels of-

Stephanie: Are you sure you don't leak through?

Berrion: I'm 100% positive because I used to be you and I was just like, "Mm-mm." So for me, I use a very specific brand and they have a heavy overnight 24-hour pair. So I make sure that I wear that that first day or two of my bleed overnight. And then I only have a four-day period. So days three and four, I wear my cup overnight and that's just because it's simple.

I wear period panties overnight because you don't have to worry about getting in there and taking it out. You just pull down your panties in the morning when you need to go tinkle, you rinse them out in the sink, like I pop them in the shower, and then I go about my day and wash them like I would any other pair of underwear.

Stephanie: You don't have to tell us if you don't want to. But what's your brand?

Berrion: Oh, I just didn't want to flag anything.

Stephanie: No, tell us.

Berrion: I use a brand called Modibodi. And the reason that I use them is because of all of the brands I've seen in terms of the cleanliness and toxic freeness of the actual panty, that's what I want to put down in that region. A lot of other brands use these little synthetic toxins that you wouldn't know of if you're not researching it. But that can actually throw off the pH balance of the vaginal canal, which we don't want. When you throw off that pH, that leads to bacterial vaginosis or it can lead to yeast infections. We don't want any of that.

So I like Modibodi. They're actually an Australian brand, but they have hit the American or US market. I do try to support as many US brands as possible, but in this area, they just seem to be like number one, and I'm okay with it.

Stephanie: Okay, we're going to link to that in the show notes and I'm going to be ordering some like when we hung up. Seriously, my mind is blown. Tell me about, really quickly, the free flowingness, why that's impor... So if you're not going to sleep for more than eight hours, is it safe to wear a tampon or should you really not...? Tell me a little bit more about that.

Berrion: I don't like to say don't do this and don't do that. But really wearing a tampon over the night, the reason it's such an issue is because it can lead to toxic shock

syndrome. And everyone experiences that differently. Like some people are in [PTs?] as a result of this TSS. That's what toxic shock syndrome is, is TSS. But what it really boils down to is-

Stephanie: Wait, they're in what because of it?

Berrion: In PTs. Some people have-

Stephanie: Oh, I think you said NPT. They're in PTs. Okay, okay.

Berrion: Yeah. And that's what the issue is. Free-flowing allows the body to get rid of what it needs to. So if you think about menstruation, it's actually a process of detoxification. It's a process of elimination. So something that needs to be coming out of the body needs to flow freely. A lot of times with tampons, what happens is you're inserting it, and then it's absorbing these toxins that are in the body, but it can actually also recirculate them if there's an imbalance present. So if we're trying to get rid of this, why would we want to plug it up?

Stephanie: Okay, that makes sense. So then should we not be wearing tampons during the day either?

Berrion: I highly recommend the organic ones. No sense, please. One of my favorite brands for tampons is The Honey Pot Co. But organic cotton. I think that it's okay during the day because you're waking and you're changing. A lot of times people are not wearing a tampon for three or four hours at a time. You're wearing one tampon, maybe four hours, then you're switching it out. So it's this constant switching, which is the most important as opposed to sleeping for an extended amount of time.

Imagine traveling for a long time. I have had flights that have been very long or tons of layover and it's like, "Oh, I like the convenience of a tampon?" My body doesn't like it. Believe it or not, tampons are actually linked to more cramping.

Stephanie: Ooh.

Berrion: Yeah. Because you have something expanding into this part of your body that actually your body's like, "I don't want any additional pressure." And then if you're using a more mainstream brand with all of these toxins and fragrances and all of that, those are chemicals and you're putting them into the most sensitive area arguably of the body. No. I feel like I'm getting off on a tangent. I'm so sorry.

Stephanie: No, you're not. Maybe other people know this, but I'm sitting here going, "I really should have known all these things." So I'm soaking this up. Okay, so tampons

during the day, as long as they're organic and don't have scents, don't have... Tell me the brands you like again.

Berrion: I like The Honey Pot Co. You can find them at Target. I'm a Target girl. I feel like anybody listening to this podcast probably... I feel like everybody loves Target. Anybody who doesn't, I'm like, "You're questionable." But I love The Honey Pot Co and I have been using them for probably three years now. I'm very loyal to just that. That's just me personally, but there are tons of other brands.

Stephanie: Okay, okay. We'll make sure to link those in the show notes. So it needs to be organic. It needs to not have a bunch of junk in it. And then it's better during the day because you're changing it out. But really you shouldn't be having your tampon in for eight hours because you're basically keeping things that need to come out of the body in the body.

Berrion: Okay. Let's just put it this way. Maybe I should have just led with this. Let me ask you a question. Do you want bacteria in your body that's not a good bacteria?

Stephanie: No.

Berrion: Okay. There's an answer for tampons and why we don't wear them overnight. Because essentially, what toxic shock syndrome is a bacterial... It's a very rare complication, but it's a bacterial infection. And it's directly linked to actually your tampons.

Stephanie: Okay, okay.

Berrion: Not to say you can never use them. It's just to say, let's not use them overnight.

Stephanie: Okay. Oh my gosh. All right. All right. Here we go. This is so helpful. This is so good. With that said, you mentioned cramping. I would love to know just a couple of the main issues that you see women having with their periods and what they can do about them.

Berrion: Oh, I love this question. So let's talk about cramps because we all are just over them. So cramps, one, the reason they happen is because generally we have something called prostaglandins in our body. And when we have higher levels of this bad, hormone-like substance, it causes inflammation. And this also causes more cramping. So you have to remember that cramping is simply the body trying to move and contract.

Now, why that happens. A multitude of reasons. The level, all that we go through. But I would say my number one tip... Should I just roll into like tips for management?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Berrion: Okay, two tips. First and foremost, organic red raspberry leaf tea, it's going to strengthen and tone the muscles of the uterus. This is what I recommend for those of you who are not pregnant right now. I want to emphasize "not pregnant." For those of you who are pregnant, one, go back to your doctor. But number two, they suggest this during your third trimester, like when you're getting closer to labor, because it really does help with the cramping. And it prepares the body in the uterus to shed what it needs to or in the case of pregnancy, you know, pop the baby out. So that's the first one that I see is cramping is probably-

Stephanie: Red raspberry leaf tea. How is that possible that a tea can strengthen your uterus?

Berrion: Oh, it's because of the actual... I guess I would say antioxidants and flavonoids actually within the tea and the herbs itself gets into the bloodstream. And so therefore it can help the body respond differently because it has different antioxidants, but it also has different vitamins and minerals, which are super essential to just a healthy body overall.

Stephanie: Okay, okay.

Berrion: Then my second thing that I recommend for cramps is something called Semaine. It is plant-based period pain relief. Stephanie, friend, let me tell you-

Stephanie: This is Girls Night, you guys. Yes, tell us everything.

Berrion: So if you are somebody who's ever reached for a Midol or a Pamperin or an ibuprofen or Advil or Tylenol, take it all and throw it in the trash and replace it with this. And I can say this in a lot of integrity because I was the person who was always throwing up, hating life on my period. And now I literally am the unrealistic girl in the tampon commercials we see. You know the girls who are laughing? That's actually me on my period.

Stephanie: What is it?

Berrion: Semaine is literally healthy, a vegan, a plant-based version of our usual painkillers. But it's got magnesium, resveratrol, ashwagandha, boswellia, all of these natural herbs, all of these natural superfoods that are literally created from the earth for us to ingest and nourish our bodies with. It is magic.

Also its female founders, okay, we love that, but they have endometriosis. So they actually created this product as a result of their pain and needing to manage it in a different way than what was recommended by their doctors or a pharmaceutical company. It's amazing.

Stephanie: We'll link to that in the show notes too. We'll have a shopping list basically for all of us.

Berrion: Cramps are the number one thing. And cramps and pain go hand in hand. I would say the next thing people always talk to me about is mood. Okay, let's talk about mood. Because Stephanie, friend, you told me all about this. You're like, it kind of impacted relationships. And I think a lot have us deal with that

So with moodiness, one, I want to explain why moodiness happens. So moodiness essentially happens because there's a dip in our estrogen levels during the fourth phase of our cycle when we're PMS-ing. When there's a dip in estrogen, some research actually shares that this dip is associated with a dip in our serotonin too, our happiness, our joy, so we're moody.

But other reasons we're moody is because we're not fully nourished, as in we're not eating enough, our blood sugar levels are not stabilized, or maybe we're restricting different things. So mood swings happen to be one of the most common things people... They're like, "How are you so happy?" And I'm like, "I'm not. I really just have great boundaries and I make sure I eat a lot."

Listen, people forget the importance of boundaries in eating. When you nourish effectively and properly, you can actually stabilize your energy levels, which is also associated with stabilizing those mood levels that you experience. And for management, with mood, not to downplay anybody, you know, if you notice you're dealing with massive mood swings, make sure you're going to therapy. But for me, I like my prayer and meditation time. And then also just not talking to people.

When I know I'm PMS-ing and I'm in a mood, rather than given the sass to everybody else, because I'm very sassy, I just kind of like, "Mm, don't talk to me right now. Who do you want today? Like you want a nice experience or not?" Like I give them the choice and then unleash the dragon if necessary.

Stephanie: I think that that's really smart, though, because I'll be tempted to make a big decision when I'm PMS-ing, or you find yourself in a conversation and there's something that just gets at you for a second. And you have the opportunity to either press into it and be like, "What do you mean by that?" or to walk away. That's something that I've been practicing really for years too is like, "This is not the

moment to make a big decision. This is not the moment to initiate that conversation. This is not the moment to push further into this. It's the moment to just take a deep breath and walk away."

[00:27:20] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! I wanted to pop in for one quick second because our show would not be possible without our sponsors. So I wanted to take a second to thank the companies sponsoring us today. Our sponsor today is a company I love. It's [HelloFresh](#).

Now, I know that lots of y'all have heard of them. But just in case you haven't, HelloFresh is America's number one meal kit that shops, plans, and delivers your favorite step by step recipes and pre-measured ingredients so you can just cook, eat and enjoy.

So you guys know this about me, but I'm not the best cook. While I've definitely gotten better over the years, I still don't love meal planning or cooking. It's just not my gift. Plus the spring is here. And if you're anything like me, your schedule fills up quickly and cutting down meal prep and shopping time is absolutely necessary. That's why I love HelloFresh.

First of all, with HelloFresh, there's something for everyone, including vegetarian, calorie smart choices, and family-friendly recipes. One of the very best meals I have probably ever made was their chicken sausage spaghetti Bolognese. It was so good. I'm still thinking about it.

And not only is the food delicious but the process of making it is so easy. All the ingredients come pre-measured in handy labeled meal kits, so you know which ingredients go with which recipes. And that means there's less waste. And I'm telling you guys, I'm a beginner in the kitchen and even I can cook these recipes. They're simple. They come outlined on pictured step by step instruction cards and they walk you all the way through the whole thing. It kind of feels like a fun cooking lesson.

I'm also a huge fan of HelloFresh because it's actually over 30% cheaper than shopping at grocery stores and their pre-portioned ingredients helps so that no food is wasted. This is great news for those of us on a budget, right?

And of course I love HelloFresh even more because they want to give you a promo code to get 16 free meals and three free gifts. If you go to hellofresh.com/girlsnight16 and use the code GIRLSNIGHT16 you can get up to 16 free meals and three free gifts. Again that's hellofresh.com/girlsnight16 and use the

code GIRLSNIGHT16 for up to 16 free meals and three free gifts. HelloFresh, thank you so much for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

Sponsor: Hey friends! Our sponsor for today's episode is an amazing female founded company called [Olive & June](#). Now, I don't know about you guys but I love having my nails done. I just feel more put together when I have a fresh manicure. But to be honest, I rarely do it.

A few times a year I do treat myself to a salon mani-pedi. I always walk out of the salon having spent like \$100 and I usually end up chipping my newly painted nails as soon as I get in the car. So then I go through a period where I decide I'm just going to do my nails myself. But no matter how hard I try, my nails always end up looking like they were painted by a 6-year-old. And that's why I'm so happy to have found Olive & June.

Olive & June founder spent a year doing and redoing and redoing her own nails, identifying all the reasons it's been impossible to make them look good on your own. And then, you guys, she fixed it. She created their Mani System that helps you achieve beautiful, salon-quality nails for just \$2 a mani.

The Mani System comes with all the tools you could possibly need, including the poppy, which is this awesome thing that you put on top of the nail polish handle to make it easier to grip and paint your nails on both of your hands. This is a game changer. With a poppy, I can finally keep the nail polish on my actual nails instead of getting it all over my fingers.

I'm not going to lie. I actually enjoy painting my nails now and the end result is seriously so good. Recently I've been wearing their nail color called Pink Sands, is this gorgeous light pink neutral color that I love. Along with their Mani System, they also have press-ons available which are my other go-to lately because if I have 10 minutes to do my nails these days, it's a total miracle.

They have four links and four shapes and a bunch of different colors and designs to choose from. And each pack of press-ons includes 21 unique sizes. So that's a total of 42 nails. That way you can always find a perfect fit. They look so real and truly beautiful.

The press-ons can last for up to 10 days and their glue is non-damaging so that your nails stay strong and healthy. And what I really love about these is that they're made from 94% post-consumer recycled material. Friends, I seriously love this company so much.

Their Mani System is going to be my new go-to gift for all of my closest people so that we can use them together at our Girls Nights. Seriously, I hope none of my people are listening to this because this is actually what they're getting for their birthdays.

Friends, painting your nails can actually be fun and affordable all because of all of Olive & June. Visit oliveandjune.com/girlsnight for 20% off of your first Mani System. That's olivandjune.com/girlsnight for 20% of your first Mani System. Olive & June, thank you so much for sponsoring our Girls Night. We just love having you.

[00:32:07] <music>

Berrion: Do you mind if we talk about how the brain changes throughout the menstrual cycle?

Stephanie: I would love that.

Berrion: So friends, let's just go ahead and run through some basic Menstrual Cycle 101. There's four phases to your menstrual cycle. The first phase is menstruation. During this time you're on your period, obviously, your hormone levels are generally at their lowest, your energy levels are at their lowest. But during this time, your brain actually has 25% more connectivity between the right and left hemispheres. So this is the perfect time for brainstorming and really kind of, as I like to say, dreaming and vision casting.

During the second phase of your cycle, this is the follicular phase. So this is post-period, but pre-ovulation, your hormone levels are beginning to rise, specifically your estrogen levels and the follicle-stimulating hormone, which I'm not going to get into the details of that. What you need to know is your energy is rising, your hormone levels are rising, and you're starting to feel more sociable.

But during this time, your brain, your hippocampus, and your amygdala, which are really key players of memory and connection and communication, they're getting larger, which I always think is super interesting. Because this is the perfect time, if you own your own business or you manage a team, this is a time where you're going to really clarify the vision. You're going to create an action plan and simulate maybe your launch plan, your content. You're going to really clarify and be very detail-oriented during this time.

Then when you're in the third phase, ovulation, this is the money-making time. This is execution. So during this time, your body has a surge in estrogen and testosterone as well as something called the luteinizing hormone. Your energy levels are higher,

your hippocampus and your amygdala are their largest, or I should say most active throughout the menstrual cycle.

Also, you're very fertile during those times. So for any of you who are trying to conceive, this is a great time to consider doing things. But also I think it's just important to know that you have the energy to perform and really show up. So do this. For me as an entrepreneur, this looks like creating all of the TikToks, all of the Instagrams, all of the anythings that I possibly can. I do a lot of that. And then I'll do things for other people.

So I'll do like group coaching or I'll teach workshops. I literally just taught a workshop over the weekend. I was ovulating and they were like, "Oh, we love this." And I'm like, "Of course, you do because I want to be here right now."

But once you're done ovulating, you're getting into that fourth and final phase of your cycle. It's called the luteal phase. Most of us know this as PMS. I say it's personal mystery solved. You know premenstrual syndrome or Berri land personal mystery solved because all of a sudden you understand why you're [unintelligible 00:35:06].

The first part of your luteal phase will feel a lot like ovulation and you're really energized. But the second part of your luteal phase, your brain actually goes from being very allocentric and really focused on the external world to being egocentric and focused on you.

So like for you, you have a heart of service, you want to serve other women, you want to connect us, right? Well, during this time, no matter what you want to do, and what your heart says, your brain is, like, "Mm-mm, have a seat, Steph. Don't do that." You know, your brain is just getting you together.

Because the prefrontal cortex, another part of the brain, actually begins to shrink in its activities. So instead of the actual part of the brain shrinking, the activity decreases. And then there's this switch from focusing on that external world to focusing on the internal world. And then it starts all over again.

Stephanie: I mean, I have so many thoughts about this. I think for the longest time I've been trying to overcome my period and overcome the cycle that we're... Like we're always somewhere in the cycle. And that's kind of frustrating. I kind of wish that we had some time off. Just like neutral.

I do think that for most of my life I've been trying to just pretend this wasn't happening, or push through or, you feel quiet and maybe a little sad or melancholy.

Like you want to curl up in a blanket. But like, no, you should get out and you should keep going.

I think that I just haven't had a whole lot of grace, I guess, for the fact that these things are happening in my brain. I don't know why, but I've just kind of wanted to push them aside. But as you're talking about this, you're talking about changes in our brains, you're talking about changes in our hormones. And so it's almost like if we were to take energy pill or something, it's like if during the certain time of the month, you're popping energy pills, you would go, "Okay, well, while I'm doing that, this is how that will impact my life. I can expect to feel this way and I can expect for that to come out of me in this form."

Whereas if you're taking melatonin during the day or something, you would expect to feel more tired, and you would sort of compensate and work around that instead of trying to make your body work around your life, if that makes sense. It's just so mind-blowing to me that we have these different, almost kind of superpowers during the month.

Berrion: Yeah.

Stephanie: That if we just are more aware of them, we will make more sense to ourselves. That happens to me so much, the personal mystery solved, where I'm like, "I just feel like life is just not good and I'm not okay. Did that person look at me weird? My feelings are hurt." I just am feeling all these things. And then I finally clue in and look at the calendar and go, "Oh, that makes sense. Okay, that's why I feel this way." This is just a more specific, complete version of that, of letting our bodies talk to us and listening to them and acting accordingly. Right.

Berrion: Yeah, I mean, everything you're saying is right. I think that your menstrual cycle is a blueprint, right? So when you learn how to use it as such, you feel a sense of peace and permission to kind of lean into like, "Hey, it's okay if I don't want to talk to you. It's okay." It's this permission slip to like, as I always tell my clients, bleed and be. Like, don't try to do everything for everyone.

Obviously, you can't do everything in sync with your cycle. Or some days you got to show up and perform even when it's the first day of your period. Like not everybody has the schedule I have where I'm like Hermit mode on my period day one. And it's not because I'm in pain. It's because I simply don't want to talk. I don't want to do anything besides go grab a Matcha Latte and go to Target. I don't want to do anything else. And that's okay. Right?

Stephanie: Yeah.

Berrion: There's a piece that comes from being aware of your cyclical nature. One of my friends, she calls it going back to Eden with your period and really understanding how natural you really are. And I'm like, "Oh, yeah, that's really interesting." I would have never thought that.

But the moment I got my hands on the biology of what was going on with my body and utilizing it as this blueprint, I was just like, "Oh, everyone's got in and out." And now you should feel better when you don't want to talk to people because your brain says don't talk to people. And if you want to power through, know your body might not like it. But it's okay. You can also do that.

Stephanie: Well, and you know what to compensate for it. You can say, like, "You know, I have this event on day one of my period, I'm understanding that my body is telling me this while my schedule or my family, or the holidays, or whatever is saying that I need to do this. But I can like, I don't know, wear something comfy, or go to bed early or make sure I have this time for myself tomorrow or something like that. You at least know what to kind of compensate for instead of asking like, "Why do I feel so weird right now?" or "I scheduled this time for rest? Why do I have so many ideas and so many thoughts? What's happening?" I guess that's what you're saying is this is cluing us into what's happening.

And there's something really beautiful about accepting and embracing the fact that we as women do live cyclically. And it's weird that men don't. It's weird that we do and then it's weird that they don't. I don't know. I think I've spent a long time pretending that this isn't happening but therefore I end up kind of confused about how I'm feeling when really my body is talking to me.

Berrion: And that's what I always tell people. This is body language. Your period feedback is a report card from your body every month. So if you're experiencing pain, maybe got a solid C that month instead of like the A because that's a perfect period.

Or if your blood is light pink as opposed to this cherry red, oh, that's actually probably a sign of lower levels of estrogen present in the body. And so next month, what you need to focus on is boosting those estrogen levels. You're utilizing food, right? It's all data. It's all feedback. And our bodies have their own language.

Unfortunately, our society, and I don't say this because I'm one of those people who doesn't like the way our society is, I think there's a lot of room for improvement, right? But our society has conditioned us to kind of be good men, if you will. Because a man resets every 24 hours because they don't have an infradian rhythm that we have.

So their circadian rhythm... we all have circadian rhythm but hormonally they reset every 24 hours. Whereas women, we reset every 21 to 35 days, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Meaning our menstrual cycle is our main hormonal reset.

Average cycle can be anywhere from 21 to 35 days. Well, back in the day, you know, kind of when the workdays were structured, they weren't really honoring the cyclical nature because they weren't necessarily aware. The research was lacking at least in our more western societies.

In some Eastern cultures and traditions, they honored it. Whereas here where, you know, we have the Industrial Revolution, more modernization and certain things like that, there was no need necessarily. Like we have regular lights that could turn on early on. I'm talking like 1900s and stuff like that. Right?

Stephanie: Yes.

Berrion: In other parts of the world, they didn't have the same advancements in the same timelines that we did from, I would say, arguably, the 1700s and 1800s, up to where we are in 2022. So I think that in such a short amount of time, humans have made great advancements, but our bodies are still and more of that... I don't like to say caveman era, because I'm like, that just seems so far removed from how we are. But that's really how our bodies are. Our bodies have not evolved as much as our society and structure has.

Stephanie: It's like our bodies are still pre-electricity. When you don't have electricity... I mean, I've lived in different countries where when it's dark, you go to bed because you can't see anything. That's when your day ends is when the sun goes down. And then your day begins when the sun comes up.

And yeah, you're exactly right, when you can flip on a light, then you can be awake at any time in the day. But our bodies didn't necessarily get the memo or maybe are sort of in the process of adapting. But it doesn't mean we were originally wired that way.

Berrion: I don't think our bodies want to adapt. I think they're kind of just like, we'll keep you alive and so that's what we have to do. Have you ever looked at your cellphone really late at night and been attacked by the blue light and your eyes are like, "Oh my gosh, you're squinting." Our bodies are like, "No, we don't actually want that."

So our bodies don't actually want to advance. Our bodies just want to be like, "I want to be in peace and harmony. So stop disrupting my peace."

Stephanie: I like that. You mentioned different colors in our blood. How do we kind of decode our bodies? And then also, how do we know when something's maybe a little bit off or when something's wrong, wrong, wrong? Like, you need to go to the doctor.

Berrion: There's a few things. And I'm just going to say it plainly. Don't be mad. We all have that one friend who's just a very direct person. I'm that friend for you right now, okay?

Stephanie: I love that.

Berrion: When it comes to decoding your body, first and foremost, you need to look at the signs and signals. So for cravings, that's your body telling you it needs certain nutrients. So for instance, if you're craving chocolate, your body doesn't want a Snickers, what your body's wanting is vitamin D and calcium. You have people like me who will tell you this straight up: that's what your body needs. But you can also Google search those things. "Why is my body craving X, Y, and Z?"

Second thing, Google is your best friend. Be cautious with Google, specifically healthline.com and WebMD because they will make you think that something is really wrong with you without trying to. Just kind of filter away from those. Not to say they're bad resources. It's to say that most people don't have the level of understanding that you need to understand the difference between what's okay versus what's them being extra and extreme, right?

Stephanie: Yes.

Berrion: And also look at the pain. Are you supposed to be walking around in pain? Yes or no?

Stephanie: I mean, I guess I don't know. I think we've spent most of our time thinking that this is part of what it means to be a woman is to be in pain. I would say that pain is supposed to be a signal that something's wrong.

Berrion: That's it. That's exactly it. So if you stub your toe, like, oh, my gosh, stubbing my toe is the worst thing ever, you immediately know that there's something wrong. So whether it's just your bruising or maybe you broke your toe, that pain is a sign that something is wrong.

That's the same thing with anything to do with your menstrual cycle. Your period is normal, your pain shouldn't be. Just because we're normalized to it and just because it's common, doesn't make it normal. So I encourage everyone to unlearn the narrative that our period is supposed to be painful. It's not. Like you can really thrive like the little girls in the tampon commercials. You can really do that. It's

possible. I can't believe I'm even saying that. But you really can smile and enjoy your period.

But also take that pain as a feedback. So if you're just dealing with mild symptoms, mild cramping, mild bloating, mild let's say migraines or headaches or something along those lines, if it's mild and it's not stopping you from doing a daily thing, then you're okay. Get yourself some Semaine and you'll be okay. Learn how to live in sync with your cycle, you'll be fine.

However, if the pain is preventing you from performing and being productive, it's preventing you from showing up for your clients or going to school, then you need to go talk to your doctor. You need to get some data. I mean, you can do basic lifestyle adjustments, but I always tell people, no, certain times you need to go talk to your doctor.

Because according to the ACOG, your menstrual cycle is your fifth vital sign. Meaning if we can find things earlier on in your youth, that can actually help them treat or diagnose things later on in life if necessary. It's not always necessary to get all of these things done. But if you see enough patterns, you know, maybe you can diagnose endometriosis or endometriosis or fibroids and different things like that.

I always tell people, if your period is any color, but red or light pink, or even like a tannish brown color, you definitely want to get in to see a doctor. And that's because if you're experiencing a purple or a blue period, which I don't want anybody to experience, but that's actually could be a sign that you have endometriosis. So we want to get out ahead of that as much as possible.

If you are seeing something that's like gray for instance or sometimes an orangey color, that actually could be a sign of an STI. So you want to get out ahead of that. You want to talk to your doctor as much as possible. But really if it's mild and manageable, you should be good to go. If you can't manage it on your own, then work with a period coach or a hormone health coach or even go see your doctor. Because at the end of the day, we all want to see you be the best you possible.

Stephanie: That's a helpful line between. Like, if it's manageable, then that's one thing. But if it's preventing you from living life the way that you want to or just living life and being able to show up at work or school and not throw up for seven days straight, then there's a problem. So this actual shedding of your uterine lining, that shouldn't hurt?

Berrion: No. Your period should not hurt. Let me tell you. The last time I had a painful period was three years ago. Now, we all have different levels of pain. And I'm not going to lie. As a former collegiate athlete, I do have a high pain. However, when I

say I don't have pain, I don't feel a cramp in my body. And trust me, I know what a cramp feels like. Okay, this is from somebody who used to deal with periods that were so bad that I was throwing up, that I was leaving high school specifically early.

I had a very heavy flow. And I was just like, "Is this normal?" And my mom was just like, "Yes, sweetie, that is part of being a girl." Now my mom comes to me, and she's just like, "Hey, what's going on with me? Tell me." And I'm just like, "Listen, you got to pay me just like everybody else, Mom." She's like, "No, don't do that." She's like, "I brought you into this world." And I'm like, "You can't take me out until God says." I just banter back and forth with her.

I just feel like [inaudible 00:51:47] from time to time. But you really shouldn't be in pain. No. I like to put pain on a scale. 0 to 2 is like minimal pain. I don't even notice it's there. That's pretty much a perfect period. 3 to I would say 5 or 6, that's manageable pain. This is like the cramping is there. I'm not really loving it, it's there but I can still deal. 7 and above, we got to talk.

Like, if you can't think straight, you can't function, if you're bleeding through your pads, and your tampons or bleeding through your panties... Oh, I've had some incidents where that happened before period panties were a thing. Before period panties existed, I would bleed through my panties.

But now it's a completely different situation. I'm a completely different person. And I've watched thousands of women's periods literally change just from knowing they don't have to be in pain. Because once you psychologically realize you don't have to be in pain, you do everything in your power to not be in pain.

Stephanie: That's so good. That's so good. Before we wrap up, I want to hear a little bit more about cycle syncing, which is just kind of syncing your life a little bit with your cycle, right?

Berrion: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Stephanie: I think most of the women in our community have regular jobs. They don't have quite the flexibility that you do or that I do. So they are in school or they have a nine to five, five days a week or six days a week, or maybe they have small kids at home like me, and they don't necessarily care what day of your cycle you're on. What are some ways that we can still do this and still listen to our bodies even if we don't have a ton of flexibility?

Berrion: I think that cycle syncing is this beautiful thing that there's levels to it. When I first started out, I still had a nine to five job in corporate America. Eye roll was not for

me. But I was able to heal my period and really start cycle syncing with fitness and nutrition. I always tell people, I ate my way to a better period.

So because there's these hormonal fluctuations throughout your cycle, your body actually needs different nutrients and different levels of macronutrients, micronutrients, and minerals throughout each phase. I'm going to make sure that you have a link to this specific Instagram post in the show notes because it's a very visual thing.

But what I always tell people in terms of fitness—I'll start there—you want to do two weeks of high intensity, high impact strength, and resistance-related training. That is going to be the week post-period and the week you're ovulating up until you realize you're irritated. The moment you realize you don't like humans anymore, you just want to harm it, you're going to turn down the intensity of your workouts.

Then you're going to do two weeks of low energies. This is going to be the week that you're PMS-ing and the week that you're on your period. Your body doesn't want to do anything strenuous and hard. So don't push it unless... I understand if you're only training for a marathon, then you may need to push a little bit harder. But your hormones are telling you what to do and not to do. So two weeks of high energy, two weeks of low energy in terms of workout.

In terms of nutrition, this is where I'll make sure there's a visual for everybody. I think during the first half of your cycle, so when you're on your period and the week post-period, what you want to focus in on is getting micronutrients and minerals. And really just making sure you're getting those proteins, healthy fats, and fiber.

Once you're off that two weeks, so once you're ovulating and when you're PMS-ing, there's actually an increase in your metabolism. So your body's going to crave more calories. Honor that. But make sure you're getting in complex carbohydrates along with those proteins, healthy fats, and fiber.

I literally have an Instagram post that tells you suggested food for each phase. So I don't want to delve too much into it because I just think it's easy to save it and use it as your grocery list and be like, "Oh, let me incorporate these like, say, green onions, or this kale, or this grass-fed beef in your diet as opposed to maybe watermelons." Because you want to see, oh, my body's retaining more water during this time. So maybe if you're like, "I don't want to be super bloated," then you're not consuming things that have a lot of water such as watermelon.

Stephanie: That makes sense. That's actually really good to know. I think I've seen conflicting things like, I feel like I need more calories during that time of the month, but I

don't... But I've also seen things that... I mean, I don't know where. I can't cite this source. But I feel like I've heard people say, "Well, no, you don't actually. So I'm like, Okay, I guess they don't actually. Then you end up kind of fighting it. And then you feel worse, because now you're hungry and you're PMS-ing. So that's terrible.

Berrion: I guess I'm a little bit of a rebel, if you will, when it comes still to this stuff because I think at the end of the day the body keeps the score and your body will tell you what he needs. So you need to listen to your body. I don't care what any professional says. And this is coming from someone who professionally I'm a board-certified Integrative Health Practitioner. So mouthful, right? I am a coach, right?

I'm telling you as a professional, it doesn't matter what I'm telling you, anybody else is telling you. If your body says, "Steph, I want some mashed potatoes today, you honor it. And you give that body some sweet mashed potatoes because that's where the nutrients is not a regular like russet potatoes. So meet yourself halfway and honor whatever the body is requesting and give yourself that permission.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. Meet yourself halfway. That's great. This is so helpful. Berri, I love this.

Berrion: Yay.

Stephanie: This is truly... I don't know. I think that our periods can be this really irritating merry-go-round that we are on for most of our lives. Or it can be this... I don't know. We either can fight it or we can embrace it. But either way it's here. So it seems like some really beautiful things can happen when we embrace it. And it seems like a really, really, really powerful form of self-care. And loving yourself and growing in your relationship with yourself and your body. This is really cool.

Berrion: Yay. I'm so glad I got to be here and that you enjoy.

Stephanie: Do you have, before we go, any last resources or products there anything that we should know about? We can also link to everything in our show notes. But any last tip like, "Try this, it'll be great."

Berrion: Okay, resource. I have my own podcast where I sit and talk about this stuff all the time. It's called Flo. So I literally always recommend my podcasts because I sit and delve into the stuff more in-depth. But I think the last thing I really want you all to realize is your menstrual cycle is literally a blueprint. Flo is a state of mind. It is something your body naturally does. And it's a way to live your life. So embrace

this side of your life. You can have a period and a life, a very enjoyable one at that. And that's really it.

Stephanie: I love that. I love that. Thanks so much, Berri.

[00:59:44] <music>

Outro: Friends, thank you so much for listening to today's episode. I cannot tell you how much it means to me to have you here at Girls Night. Before you go, I would love it if you do two quick things. The first is to subscribe. Subscribing to the podcast is the best way to make sure you never miss an episode. It's also a way easier way to listen because it's a way of bookmarking the podcast. You never have to go looking for it again, your app will just automatically download the next episode when a new one is released.

The other thing is it would mean so much to me if you just take a quick second to leave us a rating and review for the podcast. The way that iTunes suggests the podcast to new people is by the ratings and reviews. That's how we invite new friends to our Girls Night. So would you do me a huge favor and take just one quick second to leave us a rating and a quick comment about how you like the podcast so far? It would help us out so much.

And thank you to all of you who have left those beautiful five-star reviews already. It truly means the world to me. All right, friends, that's all we have for today but we'll be back next week with another episode of Girls Night. And this next one is such a good one. We'll see you then.