



Luteal Phase Self-Care Guide

We invite you to explore the following tools if you are encountering worsening mental health symptoms the week before your period, which falls in the luteal phase of your cycle. Women’s cycle-based psychological symptoms may be explained by factors such as central nervous system sensitivity to reproductive hormonal fluctuation (i.e., higher baseline cortisol during the luteal phase), or your unique genetic composition. These challenges indicate the importance of prioritizing self-care during this time to support your mind-body connection and your unique wellness needs.

1. Biobehavioral self-care to support positive mood chemicals and self-compassion:

Self-Care Component	Example
Food & Hydration	Ensure you are eating consistently throughout the day and in a way that feels nurturing for your body with a focus on whole foods (i.e., not ultra-processed) when possible. Select a water bottle you genuinely like, and aim to consume at least one full bottle in the morning, and one full bottle in the afternoon.
Physical Movement	Protect time for a 15-30-minute walk, ideally outside, and during this movement focus intentionally on what your senses are experiencing. Perhaps visualize inhaling any positive observations you wish to carry with you from the walk, and exhaling stress.
Sunlight	Sun exposure is important for mood, and thus walking outside also offers this benefit. Ensure your blinds are opened in your home, and consider sitting outside in the sunlight with a snack or beverage you enjoy as your body absorbs the sun’s benefits.
Sleep	Listen sensitively to your bodily cues for sleep and rest, as you may find that you are encountering more fatigue than usual. Consider beginning your “wind down” routine in the evening one hour- to 30-minutes earlier than normal. If you read or watch television prior to sleep, please choose content that is not excessively stimulating and instead promotes a sense of calm.

2. Strategies for distressing thoughts:

Using the skill of cognitive defusion, practice assuming an objective view of these thoughts as a “visitor” to your mind. You might respond with, “That’s a really unhelpful thought I’m not going to fuse with. I’m going to focus instead on something that’s actually helpful in this moment.” Or remind yourself that “these thoughts are increasing because I am at the luteal phase in my cycle, which means there is a biological explanation for why I’m feeling worse right now.” Work to relate to these thoughts as not about the content of what is being communicated, but a signal from your



mind-body connection that you are in need of self-care. To further practice these concepts, visit the [Noting Practice](#) meditation from self-compassion researcher, Dr. Kristin Neff.

3. Strategies for distressing emotions:

Identify specifically what you are feeling in the moment and rate the intensity of this emotion(s). This will not “erase” the emotion, yet may decrease the distress associated with the emotion. For example, acknowledging, “I feel rage at a 9/10 right now,” or, “I feel depressed at an 8/10 right now.” Remember that emotions are ephemeral and will pass through your system, and labeling your emotions with clear language will help increase your tolerance of the experience. These emotions may certainly be distressing but cannot harm you, and are a sign that you are in need of self-care. To further explore these concepts, visit the [Soften, smooth, allow: Working with emotions in the body](#) meditation from self-compassion researcher, Dr. Kristin Neff.

4. Recall the rhythm of your cycle and explore acceptance of the phase you are in:

