

Further support with cycles would benefit female bike riders

July 1 2024



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Female cyclists have overwhelmingly reported that menstrual symptoms affect their training and competitive performance, but according to new research, these factors are sometimes managed alone and not adequately

relayed to and/or considered by coaches and training staff.

Former Murdoch University Ph.D. student and elite international [cyclist](#) Dr. Serene Lee led the recent research to lift the lid on the one-time unspoken burdens in place for female cyclists.

"As a competitive cyclist I wanted to understand why the perceived impact of a menstrual [cycle](#) was incongruent to that of published research—cycling females anecdotally reported symptoms and performance deficits—but these impacts were not reflected or recognized in reporting," Dr. Lee said.

"While 80% of our respondents told us that their period-related symptoms affected their training and half believed their training should be phased-controlled, only half of the athletes discussed their hormonal cycles with their coaches.

"The study revealed that the women were manipulating their natural cycles to deal with the challenges their symptoms presented while striving for [peak performance](#)."

The study, which was carried out in conjunction with Cycling Australia, found there is a need to increase dialogue and education of female cyclists and their coaches surrounding the biology and performance impacts of menstrual cycles and oral contraceptive use.

"Recognizing how your body responds to different phases of the menstrual cycle is essential, as you may be able to adjust your training and schedule accordingly," Dr. Lee said.

"For female athletes competing at the highest levels, addressing menstrual health, and having good communication about their bodies and abilities becomes vital."

Results showed the large variation in symptoms experienced between individuals, meant that instead of addressing the issue on a larger unified scale, a more effective approach would be for female cyclists to be empowered to monitor their own unique symptoms and then communicate any concerns to training and support networks.

"I hope our recent findings and those from my follow-on Ph.D. studies can precipitate the development of mitigation strategies for female athletes," Dr. Lee said.

"Bridging the communication gap between athletes and coaches could lead to more informed [training](#) decisions, and possible stronger performances.

"And [female athletes](#) can become more empowered to collaborate to optimize their performance while respecting the natural rhythms of the female body."

The study is published in the [*Journal of Sport Sciences*](#).

More information: Serene J. L. Lee et al, Can period-related symptoms predict menstrual manipulation among Australian female cyclists?, *Journal of Sports Sciences* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/02640414.2024.2334485](#)

Provided by Murdoch University

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