To systematically review contemporary literature in order to determine the variations in dietary cravings and energy intake (EI) between the two main phases of the menstrual cycle

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Background: The female menstrual cycle is tightly regulated by the vacillating endocrine profile, which is controlled by sex hormones. Numerous bodily changes across each menstrual cycle, therefore, are expected in females, yet little is known regarding the effect of these periodic hormone fluctuations on food cravings and dietary intake.

Methods: A systematic database search (Medline, Academic Search Premier, PsycINFO, CINAHL) of the available literature led to review and critical analysis of nine articles investigating EI and food cravings across menstrual cycles of the participating females. Exclusion criteria, eliminating eating disorders and other pathologies, were applied to keep the focus on the research question. Only papers published within the last ten years were selected in order to analyse contemporary data.

Results: Data suggest a trend in increased EI, and clear evidence of increased protein intake in the Luteal Phase (LP) compared to the Follicular Phase (FP) of the menstrual cycle. No noticeable trend in food cravings between the LP and the FP was observed. These findings highlight that variations in food intake across the female menstrual cycle are apparent and that further, larger studies with more robust methodologies are essential in order to provide stronger evidence of food intake and craving variations across the female menstrual cycle.

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