

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SCENT

Your monthly cycle affects your sense of smell as much as it does your mood. *Fiona Embleton* reports on how to choose the right notes at the right time

**As women, we're hardwired to do two things: love scent and roll with the highs and lows of our monthly cycle.** So what if perfume could tend to irrational tears, spikes in anxiety and slumps in energy as our ovaries do their thing? It's not as odd as it sounds. Women have a sensitive sense of smell – partly because we are pre-programmed to sniff out the best DNA profile in the sweat of a potential mate and also because shifting hormone levels fine-tune our noses, turning them into high-powered smelling machines. 'Oestrogen and progesterone do a complicated dance, which affects a woman's sensitivity to scent between ovulation and menstruation,' says Dr Sohère Roked, a hormone specialist at the Omniya Mediclinic. 'When fertility and oestrogen levels peak, that's also when your sense of smell is sharpest.' But according to the experts, there's a third thing to consider: the mood-manipulating power of perfume, which is as emotionally charged as the pulse points it adorns. 'Your sense of smell is located in the same part of the brain that processes emotion and memory,' says Professor Rachel Herz, one of the world's leading experts on the psychology of smell. 'By triggering an emotion, scent can change how you feel and behave,' quickly making you happier, more relaxed and confident. So, on days when you feel like a hormonally overwhelmed plate-spinner, a calming scent can restore balance. Taking day one as the first day of your period, here's how the fragrance cycle works...

## DAYS 1-5

Oh, hi period. A marked dip in all your hormone levels, especially oestrogen, characterises the first phase of your monthly cycle as your body sheds its uterus lining. 'Cramps and fatigue set in, making you feel more lethargic,' says Dr Daniel Sister, a pioneering aesthetic and hormone doctor. The overarching takeaway? Don't swathe yourself in heavy, spicy scents – they can make you feel even more sluggish. But citrus notes don't have that problem. 'The molecules are very volatile so they hit your nose fast,' explains niche perfumer Ruth Mastenbroek. 'That initial burst of lemon and orange molecules evaporating on your skin make you feel energised as they come alive,' she says. Take Mugler Alien Flora Futura, which uses both the pulp and zest of the Buddha's hand fruit for bite. Seemingly fresh-squeezed mandarin characterises Prada La Femme L'Eau, while the zippy citrus in Coach Floral can lift brain fog. An ever-evolving concoction of lemon, black coffee and pear in YSL Black Opium Glowing EDT, also promises to keep your senses engaged. In this case, the drop in oestrogen levels slows down the skin's sebum production, making it drier and less able to cling on to scent, so apply an unscented body oil (try almond) first to avoid endless mists from the bottle.

## DAYS 6-12

Oestrogen is slowly on the rise as your body gets ready to release an egg in time for ovulation.

You are now moving into attraction mode and 'your sense of smell is razor sharp, enabling you to pick out subtle scents,' says Dr Sister. It's only fitting, then, that you are drawn to 'skin' scents – juices that capture the essence of naked skin with velvety woods and mellow musks, which are so softly spoken your partner has to be close enough to brush your neck with their eyelashes to detect them. Glossier's You Solid Perfume sits on a bed of iris to enhance your natural 'eau de moi', while the musks in Alaïa Paris Nude smell of sex hormones. 'Another reason you are subconsciously drawn to perfumes that only minimally mask your natural body odour is that you don't want to prevent your mating signals being sent out,' says Herz of the natural pheromones (secretions in sweat) that you will want to amplify. Seductive scents often include rose oil, which, according to Mastenbroek, 'has a similar constituent to human sweat' and lust written all over it. With its blend of rose, soft musk and fresh cyclamen, Shiseido Ever Bloom Sakura Art Edition is like clean skin between crisp sheets. While Gucci Guilty Absolute Pour Femme smoulders on skin like heat on the pavement, infusing the air with rose before taking a deeper turn as it fades to patchouli. ►

Prada La Femme L'Eau EDP, **£93.50 for 100ml**

Coach Floral EDP, **£49 for 50ml** (Fabled.com)

Mugler Alien Flora Futura EDT, **£42 for 30ml** (Harrods.com)

YSL Black Opium Glowing EDT, **£60 for 50ml**

Glossier You Perfume Solid, **£19**

Gucci Guilty Absolute Pour Femme EDP, **£68 for 50ml** (Fabled.com)

Alaïa Paris Nude EDP, **£67 for 50ml**

Shiseido Ever Bloom Sakura Art Edition EDP, **£61 for 50ml** (Fabled.com)