**The Starting Place:**

* It all starts with the hypothalamus in the brain producing [gonadotropinreleasing hormone](http://adam.about.net/encyclopedia/003709ris.htm) (GnRH)
* The GnRH will then trigger the pituitary gland to release the [follicle stimulating hormone](http://adam.about.net/encyclopedia/003710.htm) (FSH)

**The Follicle Stimulating Hormone:**

* The FSH then makes the journey to the female's ovaries (via the bloodstream)
* Once it arrives, it initiates the growth of a [follicle](http://adam.about.net/encyclopedia/8652.htm)

**The Role of the Follicle:**

* When the follicle develops, it generates estrogen
* After about 10 days, the estrogen levels reach high numbers
* The estrogen levels peak approximately 1 day before [ovulation](http://contraception.about.com/od/contraceptionoverview/p/conception.htm) (typically, this is day 13 in a standard 28 day cycle)
* This peak elicits a surge of [luteinizing hormone](http://adam.about.net/encyclopedia/LH-blood-test.htm) (LH) from the pituitary gland.

**The LH Surge:**

* This surge acts a cue to the ovarian follicle
* About 36 hours later, a mature egg is released into the fallopian tube
* The egg leaves behind the [corpus luteum](http://adam.about.net/reports/000585.htm) (the empty follicle)

**The Corpus Luteum:**

* The cells of the corpus luteum then produce progesterone and estrogen
* Together, these two hormones stimulate the uterine lining to thicken with blood
* This is done to prepare the uterus walls for nurturing a fertilized egg

**The Shrinking of the Corpus Luteum:**

* The corpus luteum will begin to diminish
* This leaves the uterine lining with no hormonal support
* The lining will begin to shed off
* The female's monthly period begins

The low levels of estrogen and progesterone also signal the hypothalamus to start the process over again.