

# Premenstrual Syndrome



## What is Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)?

Premenstrual Syndrome is an assortment of symptoms that many women experience before their menstrual period. Symptoms include:

- Bloating
- Mood swings/irritability/anxiety
- Depression, sadness or crying
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Backache
- Skin problems
- Tender breasts
- Weight gain/food cravings
- Constipation/diarrhea
- Swollen hands/feet

There are no laboratory tests or specific symptoms to diagnose PMS. You may be asked to keep a diary for at least two menstrual cycles to help establish a pattern of symptoms. List in your diary the symptoms you experience each day and whether they are mild, moderate or severe.

## What causes PMS?

The cause of Premenstrual Syndrome is unknown but several factors may contribute to the condition.



Monthly changes in your female hormones caused by your menstrual cycle seem to be an important cause. Chemical changes in the brain also may be involved. Changing levels of Serotonin, a brain chemical that is thought to play a crucial role in mood changes, could trigger the symptoms as well as fatigue, food cravings and sleep problems. Some PMS symptoms have been linked to low levels of vitamins and minerals. Other possible contributors to PMS include eating a lot of salty foods, which may cause bloating or swelling and drinking alcohol and caffeinated beverages, which may cause mood and energy level changes.

## Can PMS be treated?

There is no one effective treatment for PMS but many women experience some relief of symptoms with lifestyle changes, diet and exercise. Other treatments include supplements and medication.

## How can I change my lifestyle?

The most significant changes you can make to deal with your PMS are changes in diet and exercise and reducing your stress level. These are factors you can choose to control without needing clinic visits or medication. The first of these is diet:

- If you are overweight, lose weight. Heavier women experience more symptoms
- Eat smaller, more frequent meals each day to reduce bloating. Do not skip meals.

- Follow a healthy diet with fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods, protein rich foods, and calcium rich foods.
  - Whole grain foods: whole wheat bread, whole grain crackers, oatmeal, shredded wheat cereal, brown rice and whole wheat pasta.
  - Protein rich foods: fish, seafood, eggs, chicken, turkey, beef, cooked dried beans, nuts, tofu and soy products.
  - Calcium rich foods: milk, yogurt, cheese, calcium enriched orange juice.
- Limit salt and salty foods to reduce bloating and fluid retention.
- Decrease fatty, greasy foods
- Increase leafy green vegetables and fruits
- Stay away from white processed flour and sugar before and during your period.
- Avoid caffeine such as coffee, black tea, soda and caffeinated drinks.
- Avoid alcohol which has an effect on all the mood related symptoms and can disrupt sleep.
- Avoid fast foods such as McDonalds, Burger King, and Taco Bell. Processed fast foods are high in sugar and salt, which can contribute to symptoms.



Increasing daily exercise can also decrease PMS symptoms. Plan on getting at least 30 minutes of exercise every day. Recommended activities include brisk walking, bicycling, swimming or other forms of active physical exercise. Regular exercise can relieve PMS symptoms like fatigue, irritability, depression, swelling, constipation and sleep problems.

You can also reduce your symptoms with stress management. Look for ways to reduce stress in your life. Recommendations for reducing stress include:

- Get plenty of sleep and eat a nutritious diet
- Exercise daily
- Practice deep breathing exercises
- Try Yoga and massage as ways to relax and relieve stress.
- Decrease the amount of activities in your life. Cut back on activities that are not important to you
- Practice deep breathing in highly stressful situations and try to relax
- Find a relaxing hobby or activity like reading, painting or needlework and make time for it each day
- Spend time with friends
- Take a long walk

## Are there supplements I can take for PMS?

Before starting supplements, discuss with your doctor/nurse midwife/nurse practitioner. There are a number of vitamin and mineral supplements that have been shown to offer some relief for PMS. These include:

- Calcium 1000-1200 mg of dietary and supplemental calcium daily may reduce the physical and psychological symptoms of PMS. Regular long term use of calcium carbonate also reduces your risk of osteoporosis (brittle bones in older women that break easily).
- Magnesium 400 mg of supplemental magnesium daily may help to reduce fluid retention, breast tenderness, bloating and constipation. Magnesium also reduces sugar cravings.



- Vitamin D 400-800 IU of supplemental Vitamin D
- Essential Fatty Acids (Fish Oils); Omega 3/6/9 are helpful in reducing PMS symptoms, take as directed.
- Vitamin B6 50-100 mg of vitamin B-6 may help some women reduce symptoms of PMS.
- Vitamin E 400 - 600 IU a day may ease PMS symptoms by reducing the production of prostaglandins, hormone like substances that cause cramps and breast tenderness.
- Some women find relief with 1500 mg Evening Primrose Oil daily

## What about PMS medications?

There is no specific medication for PMS. Your healthcare provider can talk to you about your symptoms and how best to treat them if you have tried the natural treatments without relief. For women with severe mood swings, taking antidepressants daily, especially during the two weeks before the period starts, may be helpful. Ibuprofen may ease cramping and breast tenderness. If you are having a lot of bloating, your healthcare provider may prescribe diuretics (water pills) to help your kidneys pass the extra fluid. Some women find that birth control pills improve their symptoms by reducing the monthly hormonal changes. Other women have found Depo-Provera useful in treatment of severe PMS. Depo works by stopping ovulation but has many other side effects.

Your doctor/nurse midwife/nurse practitioner will help you determine the best medication for your particular needs.