

Premenstrual Syndrome

When Is It Really PMS?

Most women notice mood and body changes such as crankiness and bloating as their period approaches, but it is only officially PMS if it:

- makes daily living very difficult and
- flares up during the 5 to 14 days before menstruation

About 40% of menstruating women have PMS; for 5% normal life is extremely difficult. If you still feel lousy *after* your period (1st part of cycle), the problem may have other causes. Try keeping a calendar-diary of your symptoms to help with the diagnosis and treatment.

What Are the Symptoms?

A wide range of physical or emotional symptoms have been associated with PMS. The most common physical symptoms are:

- ▶ bloating, fluid retention
- ▶ breast swelling and tenderness
- ▶ headache
- ▶ weight gain
- ▶ joint or muscle pain, low back pain
- ▶ clumsiness
- ▶ constipation or diarrhea

Usually, the emotional symptoms are far worse:

- ▶ tension, irritability, anger
- ▶ anxiety, panic attacks
- ▶ mood swings, crying, even hopeless depression
- ▶ confusion, lethargy, fatigue
- ▶ intense food cravings, usually for sweets and other carbohydrates
- ▶ sleep disturbances

What Causes PMS?

An exact cause of PMS has not been identified, however, it is related to hormonal, chemical and/or nutritional imbalances. A cyclic drop in glucose, or blood sugar may contribute to headache, moodiness, and confusion.

How Can I Get Relief?

Sometimes making a few simple lifestyle changes is all it takes:

- ▶ When PMS hits, try eating several small meals (every 4 hours) each day. Instead of loading up on sweets, make sure you include whole grains (whole wheat, oatmeal, brown rice) vegetables, and lean protein (fish, soy foods,

chicken) - slow-burning foods that are low in fat and refined carbohydrates.

- ▶ Minimize the salt and caffeine. Salt causes water retention and caffeine can make you feel irritable or depressed. Cut back on caffeine slowly as your period nears, to avoid withdrawal headaches.



- ▶ Nutritional supplements of calcium (1200 mg) and magnesium (400 mg) are often very helpful. Vitamins E and B6 have been suggested, but studies show them to be less effective for most.

- ▶ Avoid alcohol and soda. Drink plenty of water - don't fear it will add to bloating, as water actually helps rid you of body-swelling salt. Dehydration causes water-retention!



- ▶ Moderate aerobic exercise helps most PMS sufferers. Try taking a brisk 30-minute walk each day.

▶ Recognize that your body may have different sleep requirements at different times during your menstrual cycle. Adjust your bedtime and naps to your needs.

- ▶ PMS seems to feed on stress. Practice relaxation through yoga, meditation, stretching, hot baths, and consider joining a support group.

Should I Get Help?

Don't feel badly if you can't control PMS on your own. Many women can't. If you need more help, see your health care provider for further treatment. Medications sometimes used are: some types of birth control pills, a diuretic to help with bloating, an antidepressant, sometimes taken for only part of the cycle and which can help both the mental and physical symptoms.

Other Resources:

www.obgyn.net

National Women's Health Network - 202-628-7814. Call to receive information packet for a small fee.

http://onhealth.com/conditions/resource/conditions/item_463.asp

