



women's
health clinic

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is the name for a group of symptoms that can happen the week before the menstrual period. The symptoms usually go away after your period starts. PMS is very common; 75% of women have mild PMS symptoms as part of their monthly cycle. PMS may be a monthly bother or it may be so severe that it makes it hard to even get through the day.

What causes PMS?

No one knows the exact causes of PMS, but it is probably linked to the changing hormones during the menstrual cycle.

What are the symptoms?

Almost every woman has some of the symptoms of PMS at some point in her life. They include physical, emotional and psychological symptoms:

- Depressed mood
- Anger
- Irritability, mood swings or crying spells
- Tension
- Trouble concentrating or remembering
- Food cravings or appetite changes
- Bloating
- Acne
- Breast swelling and tenderness
- Headache or backache
- Feeling tired
- Difficulty sleeping
- Hot flashes
- Heart palpitations
- Abdominal cramping and pain

How is PMS treated?

If your symptoms are relatively mild or moderate, changes in your lifestyle may help. These may take a few months before you notice an improvement.

- Eating a variety of foods, especially complex carbohydrates (whole grain products, legumes)
- Being active
- Relaxation
- Reflexology
- Avoid salt, sugary foods, caffeine and alcohol, especially when you are having PMS symptoms
- Get enough sleep. Try to get 8 hours of sleep each night, or take naps if possible.
- Taking time to do things that help you relax and minimizing stressful activities
- Vitamins and natural treatments:
 - Calcium (1200 mg/day) can help with PMS and is good for bone health.
 - Magnesium (200-360 mg/day) may help with PMS symptoms.
 - Vitamin B6 (50-100 mg/day)

It is important that if you take any over the counter vitamins or supplements not to take more than the recommended amount as they can be dangerous in large amounts.

If symptoms are more severe or don't improve with the above suggestion, there are other options:

- Birth control pills: Can help with cramps and headaches. It can also help decrease mood changes that women can have around their period.
- Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) that change serotonin levels in the brain have helped some women with their emotional symptoms.
- Anti-inflammatory medications (Naproxen) may help to relieve cramping.

It is important to talk to your health care provider or a pharmacist before taking any medication, including vitamins, minerals and herbal treatments, to make sure they won't interact with other health conditions or medications you may be taking.

Other places to look for information: (Women's Health Clinic does not run these sites and is not responsible for information found there)

Mayo Clinic PMS info: www.mayoclinic.com/health/premenstrual-syndrome/DS00134

Sexuality and U: www.sexualityandu.ca/en/sexual-health/all_about_menstruation/cramps-pimples-and-pms

Web MD PMS info: <http://women.webmd.com/guide/premenstrual-syndrome>

Disclaimer: WHC provides health information for your learning only. It should not be used to replace a visit with a health care provider.

© Women's Health Clinic, May 2011

HE: mrj