

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)

Q: What is Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)?

A: PMS is a group of symptoms linked to the menstrual cycle which usually occur one to two weeks before your period begins.

Q: What causes PMS?

A: The causes of PMS are not clear, but have been linked to changing hormones during the menstrual cycle. Stress and emotional problems do not cause PMS, but they may make it worse. As many as 85% of women have at least one symptom of PMS during their regular monthly cycle. Diagnosis of PMS is made based on your symptoms, when they occur, and how much they affect your life.

Q: What are the symptoms of PMS?

A: PMS often includes both physical and emotional symptoms. Common symptoms include: acne; breast swelling and tenderness; fatigue; difficulty sleeping; upset stomach, bloating, constipation or diarrhea; headache or backache; appetite changes or food cravings; joint or muscle pain; trouble concentrating or remembering; tension, irritability, mood swings or crying spells; anxiety or depression. Symptoms vary from one woman to another. If you think that you have PMS, keep track of which symptoms you have for several months, using the calendar attached, and speak with your healthcare professional.

Q: What treatments are available for PMS?

A: There is no one effective treatment for PMS, but many women experience some relief of symptoms with changes in physical activity, diet and lifestyle habits.

- **Exercise:** Helps alleviate constipation, fatigue, irritability, swelling, and sleep problems. Engage in an activity that you can enjoy and one that can become a regular part of your lifestyle. Although aerobic activity may have a greater benefit, any type of exercise is beneficial. Taking long walks, gardening and yoga may also be soothing. Remember that exercise should not be stressful or cause discomfort.
- **Nutrition:** Limit salty foods starting a few days before your period is due. This can help with bloating, swelling and weight gain. Limiting caffeine-containing beverages such as coffee, tea and soft drinks may improve symptoms related to sleep, fatigue and irritability. Follow a healthy diet which includes fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods, protein-rich foods and calcium-containing foods.
- **Supplements:** There are numerous products on the market that claim to provide relief for PMS and PMDD. Use caution before experimenting with these supplements as some may have unexpected side effects, including interactions with other medications. Take a multivitamin with calcium each day. Studies have shown that consuming adequate amounts of Calcium and Vitamin D not only prevent Osteoporosis, but also decrease symptoms of PMS. Vitamin B6 100 mg/daily may also be helpful.

- **Lifestyle changes:** Get adequate rest. Sleep helps combat fatigue, irritability, mood swings and headache. Work on managing stress. Find healthy ways of coping by talking to friends, exercising, keeping a journal or using relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or yoga.

Q: What is Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)?

A: There is evidence that a brain chemical called serotonin plays a roll in a severe form of PMS called Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder. The main symptoms of PMDD include: feelings of sadness or despair, or possibly suicidal thoughts; feelings of tension or anxiety; panic attacks; mood swings, crying; lasting irritability or anger that affects other people; disinterest in daily activities or relationships; trouble thinking or focusing; fatigue or low energy; food cravings or binge eating; sleep difficulties; feeling “out of control”; physical symptoms such as bloating, breast tenderness, headaches and muscle or joint pain. These symptoms begin about two weeks before your period and subside once your period starts. *You must experience at least five of these symptoms to be diagnosed with PMDD.*

Q: What is the treatment for PMDD?

A: Lifestyle changes as mentioned in the treatment for PMS may also be successful in treating PMDD. Antidepressants called SSRIs, or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors that change serotonin levels in the brain have also been shown to help some women with PMDD. Individual and/or group counseling may also be helpful in managing symptoms of PMDD.

For more information about premenstrual syndrome, call womenshealth.gov at 202-690-7650 or contact the following organizations:

National Institute of Mental Health The Hormone Foundation
(NIMH), NIH, HHS Phone Number: (800) 467-6663
Phone Number: (866) 615-NIMH (6464)

American College of Obstetricians
and Gynecologists (ACOG)
Phone Number: (800) 762-2264
Internet Address: <http://www.acog.org>

- The National Women’s Health Information Center <http://www.womenshealth.gov/faq/pms.htm>
- The National Institutes of Health and the US National Library of Medicine MedlinePlus <http://medlineplus.gov/>