

What You Should Know About PMS and PMDD

Many women experience discomfort 7 to 14 days prior to menstruation. Typical symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) include:

- Bloating
- Constipation
- Depression, sadness, crying
- Fatigue
- Headache
- Backache
- Increased hunger
- Food cravings
- Weight gain
- Irritability
- Tender breasts
- Skin problems
- Poor sleep
- Swollen hands or feet.

Difficulties vary from person to person, and often, from cycle to cycle. There is no one effective treatment for PMS and PMDD, but many women experience some relief of symptoms with changes in physical activity, diet, and lifestyle habits.

Exercise

- Try to incorporate some form of physical activity into your daily routine. Although aerobic activity (eg, brisk walking, cycling, jogging, swimming, roller blading) may have a greater benefit, any type of exercise is beneficial. For example, walking instead of driving (when possible), taking long walks with a pet, gardening, raking leaves, or practicing yoga or tai chi can be soothing.
- Exercise helps alleviate constipation, fatigue, irritability, swelling, and sleep problems.

- Engage in an exercise that you enjoy and one that can become a regular part of your lifestyle.
- Keep in mind that exercise should not be stressful or cause discomfort.

Nutrition

- Do not skip meals. Going long periods of time between meals contributes to cravings, irritability, fatigue, and sometimes headaches.
- Most women do better eating smaller amounts of food. Large meals often cause bloating and general discomfort.
- If necessary, eat a small snack between meals to curb hunger.
- Do not feel anxious about premenstrual weight gain; it is temporary. Most women notice that their weight returns to normal a few days into the start of their menstrual cycle.

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- Follow a healthy diet. Be sure to include fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods, protein-rich foods, and calcium-containing foods in your daily diet. Avoid any “diet” that restricts any of these foods.
- Examples of whole grain foods are whole wheat bread, whole grain crackers, oatmeal, shredded wheat cereal, brown rice, and whole wheat pasta.
- Examples of protein-rich foods are fish, seafood, eggs, chicken, turkey, beef, pork, cooked dried beans, nuts, tofu, and soy products.
 - New research has shown that a diet rich in calcium and vitamin D (both found in milk) may be associated with fewer symptoms. Milk, yogurt, cheese, fortified soy milk, and fortified orange juice are all good sources of calcium. Vitamin D is also found in eggs and fish, and is manufactured in the body from exposure to sunlight.
- Cut back on salty foods starting a few days before your period is due. Most fast foods; chips; pretzels; olives; pickles; pizza; pepperoni; sausage; cheese; and purchased soups, sauces, and gravies (homemade are generally fine) are some examples of foods high in salt.
- Limiting salty foods can help with bloating, swelling, and weight gain.
- Limit your caffeine intake. Cut down on coffee, coffee-containing beverages, tea, and caffeinated soft drinks. Some women find that less caffeine helps improve symptoms related to sleep, fatigue, and irritability.
- Cut down on or avoid alcohol. Drinking alcohol has an effect on all the mood-related symptoms and can also disrupt sleep.

Resources

- 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/>

Supplements

A number of products on the market claim to provide relief for PMS and PMDD. Use common sense and caution before experimenting with these supplements; some may have unexpected side effects, including interactions with other medications. Results of studies on the advantages of various herbs, vitamins, and minerals have generally not been convincing. However, the latest news on calcium and vitamin D suggests that women who consume higher amounts of these nutrients have fewer symptoms than those who consume very small amounts. The benefits and safety of both calcium and vitamin D in preventing osteoporosis (bone weakening associated with aging) are well known. Women who do not get enough of these vitamins from food sources should consider taking supplements.

Recommended amount of calcium for adult women:

Ages 19 to 50 years	1,000 mg per day
Ages over 50 years	1,200 mg per day

Recommended amount of vitamin D for all adult women:

400 to 800 IU per day

Lifestyle Habits

- Get enough rest. Sleep helps combat fatigue, irritability, mood swings, and headaches.
- Work on managing stress. Although no one lives a stress-free life, coping with stress is very important. Use relaxation techniques, deep breathing, massage, yoga, or other forms of exercise to help reduce stress. If necessary, work with a counselor or therapist to develop healthy stress-management habits.
- Stress management is likely to help with many of the psychological symptoms of PMS or PMDD.

This Patient Handout was prepared by Lynn Danford, MS, CDE, LD, using materials from The National Women’s Health Information Center; and Bertone-Johnson ER, Hankinson SE, Bendich A, Johnson SR, Willett WC, Manson JE. Calcium and vitamin D intake and risk of incident premenstrual syndrome. Arch Intern Med. 2005;165(11):1246-1252.