

## PMS

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS), also known as Premenstrual Tension (PMT), is a collection of physical and emotional symptoms that occur before the start of menstruation. Around eighty percent of women suffer from PMS but there is no need to suffer in silence. The symptoms of PMS are:

### Physical

Abdominal bloating  
Swollen hands or feet  
Breast tenderness  
Weight gain  
Headaches  
Nausea and/or vomiting  
Diarrhea  
Constipation  
Appetite changes  
Muscle and joint pain  
Acne  
Insomnia

### Emotional

Irritability  
Anger  
Depression  
Anxiety  
Tension  
Fatigue  
Poor concentration  
Crying spells  
Feeling overwhelmed or out of control

### Causes

PMS affects women between the ages of 20 and 40. It is most common in women over 30. PMS is caused by excess estrogen and a corresponding deficiency in progesterone. Estrogen builds up in the body when it cannot be properly eliminated by the liver. Women who suffer from PMS tend to eat diets that are high in refined carbohydrates, sugar, dairy and sodium and low in fiber. A diet that is low in fiber results in sluggish or toxic bowels. When the bowels do not eliminate optimally the liver gets backed up as it tries to compensate for toxins not being eliminated through the bowels. This scenario can lead to symptoms of PMS. A diet that is deficient in certain nutrients can also contribute to PMS.

### Diagnosis

There are no physical examination findings or lab tests specific to the diagnosis of PMS. It is important that a complete history and physical examination be conducted to rule out other potential causes for symptoms that may be attributed to PMS. Correct diagnosis of premenstrual syndrome can be made only when the symptoms occur regularly. A symptom calendar can help women identify the most troublesome symptoms and to confirm the diagnosis of PMS. There are no specific tests for the diagnosis of PMS. However, tests may be run to rule out other causes for symptoms thought to be caused by PMS.

## **Treatment**

### **Diet**

The most effective way to treat PMS is through diet modification. General guidelines for a healthy diet include the elimination of all junk food, processed food, hydrogenated fat, sugar, and caffeinated drinks. The diet should contain adequate protein, plenty of healthy fats, complex carbohydrates and a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. Foods rich in vitamin A, vitamin D, B complex (especially B6), vitamin E, calcium, magnesium and essential fatty acids.

**Vitamin A:** Cod liver oil, liver, butter, egg yolks.

**Vitamin D:** Oily fish, cod liver oil.

**Vitamin B<sub>6</sub>:** Brown rice, whole wheat, rye, lentils, alfalfa, tuna, peas, bananas, cashews, turkey, oats, blackstrap molasses, cabbage.

**Pantothenic Acid:** Brewer's yeast, brown rice, sunflower seeds, corn, lentils, whole wheat, rye.

**Vitamin E:** Fresh wheat germ, wheat germ oil, whole wheat, raw nuts, olive oil, broccoli, pecans.

**Calcium:** Dark green leafy vegetables Raw milk and raw milk cheeses, sesame seeds, kelp, sardines, almonds, Brazil nuts, blackstrap molasses, watercress, salmon, broccoli.

**Magnesium:** dark green leafy vegetables, kelp, blackstrap molasses, sunflower seeds, all nuts, oats, brown rice, corn, bananas, tuna.

**Fatty Acids:** Cod liver oil, salmon, sardines, mackerel, egg yolks and borage, black currant or evening primrose oil.

### **Supplements**

When it is not possible to reach optimal levels of these nutrients in the diet supplementation can be very helpful. The following are recommendations only. For a truly personalized supplement program, one should see a properly trained health professional familiar with vitamin/mineral therapy.

- Vitamin A: 50,000 IU per day
- Vitamin B<sub>6</sub>: 100-200 mg per day
- Vitamin E: 400-600 IU per day
- Calcium: 1,500 mg per day
- Magnesium: 800 mg per day
- Fatty Acids: 2-4 gms per day

### **Herbs**

Several botanical remedies are helpful for balancing a woman's hormone levels and relieving symptoms. They include, but are not limited to:

- Vitex
- Fringe tree bark
- Burdock root
- Dandelion root
- Cramp bark

### **Stress reduction**

Cortisol, the body's main stress hormone, is made from the same precursors as progesterone. When the body needs to make more cortisol in response to external stress it sacrifices progesterone in the process. This leads to symptoms of PMS and even missed periods. To help reduce stress, use strategies such as yoga, meditation, and relaxation therapies. It may also be helpful to try and rearrange your schedule if possible, so that you are reducing stressful factors or events in the time that leads up to your period.

### **Exercise**

Exercise increases endorphin levels within the body, the chemicals that are responsible for a sense of wellbeing and pain relief. Regular exercise is also helpful for reducing stress and maintaining self esteem. Exercise has been shown to be helpful with PMS, with those who exercise reporting an improvement in their PMS symptoms. Aerobic exercises such as walking, running, swimming, aerobics, and dancing appear to be the best forms.