

PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME DIET SHEET

Premenstrual tension or syndrome (PMS/ PMT) is the collection of symptoms that are associated with menstruation and is now recognised as a genuine medical problem. Around 150 different symptoms have been recorded in association with PMS. These vary from mild to severe and include physical symptoms such as fluid retention, breast swelling and pain, headaches and appetite changes; and emotional and mental symptoms such as insomnia, anxiety, irritability and depression. Less obvious symptoms also include clumsiness, aggravation of existing chronic conditions and lowered immunity.

PMS can last for up to 21 days of the menstrual cycle and sometimes persist into the period. Events in a woman's life will affect the balance of her hormones and vice versa. Hormones can be affected by diet, every day demands on our energy, pollution, stress, food and water intake.

SELF HELP

Exercise

Long slow distance exercise (such as walking) or yoga are recommended as physical symptoms seem to be handled better when these activities are incorporated into the lifestyle. Exercise improves abdominal circulation and can reduce fluid retention.

Stress Management

Suitable techniques such as meditation or even counselling are useful.

Diet

Carbohydrates

It has been suggested that rises in oestrogen change glucose tolerance and cause sugar cravings, headaches, palpitations and dizziness. To help balance blood sugar levels refined carbohydrates such as cakes, sweets, biscuits, white flour products should be avoided. Read the labels on foods for sugar content. **Eat unrefined carbohydrates** such as wholegrain bread and pasta, brown rice and use wholemeal flour. Eating small amounts regularly will also help. If symptoms are severe limit fruit intake to two pieces a day. This can also have a positive effect on progesterone levels and therefore help with other symptoms.

Fats

Symptoms such as breast pain and sore joints or muscles can be improved by reducing saturated fat intake. These fats can disrupt prostaglandin balance. Prostaglandins are hormone-like substances which regulate the menstrual cycle. Reduce dairy product and meat intake. **Increase vegetable protein intake** - nuts, beans and pulses; **increase essential fatty acid intake** - fish intake - especially oily; avocados, cold-pressed oils such as olive, sesame, flaxseed, hempseed and walnut; sprouting seeds such as alfalfa, green leafy vegetables.

Salt

Reduce salt intake. High sodium foods can aggravate fluid retention. **High potassium foods** such as grapefruit juice, bananas, rice, tomatoes, potatoes, grapes, dates, pears, cabbage, almonds, watercress and other green leafy vegetables have a diuretic action and help reduce fluid retention.

Caffeine

Coffee, tea, chocolate, fizzy and energy drinks contain caffeine. It is known to aggravate premenstrual symptoms such as headaches, moodswings, anxiety, fluid retention. Choose **caffeine-free drinks** instead.

Other stimulants

Stimulants such as alcohol and cigarettes should also be avoided as these affect mood changes.

Helpful Nutrients

B vitamins - nourish the nervous system. Rich sources are brown rice, marmite, yoghurt, mushrooms, eggs, muesli, wheatgerm, brewers yeast and green vegetables.

Magnesium — essential for a healthy nervous system, chocolate cravings are thought to be associated with low magnesium levels in the body. Rich sources are figs, millet, molasses, dark green vegetables, brown rice, apples, nuts and seeds.

Iron - During each period about 15-30mg of iron are lost. This should be made up again naturally by the body but women with heavy periods, vegetarians and vegans will especially benefit from increasing iron intake before and during a period. Rich food sources include meat, egg yolks, dark green vegetables, nuts, dried fruits (especially apricots), molasses, soya flour.

Supplements

Your herbalist may recommend a nutritional supplement for you:

Floradix/Floravital liquid iron formula

Evening primrose/Starflower oil/Fish oils/Udo's choice/Flax or Hemp oil

Vitamin B complex

Magnesium and/or vitamin B6

Vitamin E