

MANAGING Premenstrual Syndrome

Natural
Remedies for
PMS

PMS affects women in different ways and to varying extremes but it can be extremely distressing. Symptoms can be diverse including bloating, fluid retention, breast tenderness, moods swings, anxiety, irritability, depression, extreme food cravings, headaches, spots, insomnia and fatigue. However, the good news is that diet and natural remedies can significantly alleviate PMS symptoms.

CRAVINGS

Due to intense cravings before periods many women overindulge in sugary, fatty foods which can lead to a downward spiral of feeling guilty, fat and unattractive. Keeping blood sugar levels balanced significantly helps and can be achieved by basing meals and snacks around vegetables with protein and healthy fats such as lean meat, fish, eggs, chickpeas, beans, lentils, avocado, nuts and seeds.

The recent trend towards Paleo style diets is not necessarily the best approach in the premenstrual period because fibre rich complex carbohydrates such as oats and brown rice in addition to vegetables and pulses increase tryptophan, the precursor to mood enhancing serotonin. This may help to explain why women often crave carbohydrates before periods.

However, whilst complex carbohydrates can be balancing, sugar and refined carbohydrates have the opposite effect. It can feel as if you need these foods to "pick you up" but they actually upset blood sugar levels leading to vicious cycle of increased cravings, moods swings and energy dips. Refined carbohydrates include cakes, biscuits, pastry, crisps plus white versions of rice, bread and pasta. In reality I have found that even women whose diets are extremely balanced can still experience intense cycle related cravings. For these occasions it can help to have a few sweet but nourishing treats to hand such as banana and almond butter on oatcakes, banana and egg pancakes, 70% + dark chocolate, Nakd or Pulsin bars. Also try not to give yourself a hard time if you succumb to cravings but just accept it and gently bring yourself back on track.

Caffeine from coffee, black tea or chocolate can contribute to breast tenderness in some women so its worth switching to organic decaf, water and herbal or fruit teas. Alcohol may also worsen PMS symptoms by interfering with the clearance of hormones.

Some foods are particularly beneficial, exerting a hormone balancing effect by supporting the clearance of excess oestrogen from the body. These foods include broccoli, cabbage, kale, watercress, rocket, onions, garlic and flaxseeds.

A Homeopathic Remedy to Suit You...

Homeopathic remedies are a safe, natural and powerful way of balancing hormones and supporting women with the challenges of PMS. Have a read though the remedy descriptions below and see if any of them resonate with you.

IRRITABLE, IMPATIENT, ANGRY

Nux Vomica is an absolutely brilliant remedy and undoubtedly one of my most prescribed remedies for both women and men, probably as a result of the fast paced world in which we live. It is especially useful for cycle related irritability, impatience and anger. I find the most effective potency for intense irritability is a 10M and it can actually help you feel calmer within a matter of minutes. Its also helpful for people who never feel they have enough time (most women!), who rely on tea and coffee to keep going and alcohol to relax so end up feeling terrible as a result.

TEARFUL AND SENSITIVE

Pulsatilla is a lovely remedy for women who feel tearful and sensitive before their periods and feel better after a good cry or a cuddle. This remedy may suit you if your moods change quickly from one moment to the next as Pulsatilla is often described as "An April Day". Pulsatilla is also a wonderful remedy during puberty for young women who haven't felt like themselves since their periods started. Often women who need Pulsatilla can be quite shy but in my experience this isn't always the case. Periods can be extremely painful with restlessness, chilliness and disturbed sleep.

EMOTIONAL, JEALOUS, INSECURE

Lachesis is balancing remedy for women who tend to be emotionally intense, passionate, chatty, witty and charismatic but before periods they feel irritable, may experience feelings of jealousy and insecurity and can be sharp tongued. Ladies needing Lachesis feel like a pressure cooker about to explode before periods but as soon as her period starts the pressure is relived and she feels much better. Lachesis is also a remedy for pain and problems with the left ovary and for women who are warm blooded, prone to flushes of heat and suffer from restless sleep.

DRAINED, TEARFUL, DEPRESSED

Sepia is a restorative remedy for women who feel totally drained and dragged down. Women needing Sepia can feel tearful, depressed, irritable and critical before periods, particularly towards loves ones. They just want to be left alone as they are worn out and simply don't have enough energy or patience to deal with things. Their sex drive is often low which is due to feeling totally drained. However, one of the things that will help women needing Sepia is intense physical exercise which they find invigorating despite a general lack of energy. During periods women needing Sepia experience dragging pains and feel as if they must cross their legs to prevent everything dropping out.

MOOD SWINGS & EMOTIONAL OUTBURSTS

Ignatia is great for PMS with intense emotional outbursts, sensitivity and extreme mood fluctuations from one moment to the next. However, unlike Pulsatilla they generally do not want to be comforted. Like Nux Vomica, women needing Ignatia are driven, setting high ideals and expectations for themselves and others. Women resonating with this remedy may use food to control stress, either bingeing or starving themselves and it's a remedy that is sometimes indicated in bulimia and anorexia, especially after grief. Like Sepia, they tend to feel better if they exercise, especially running or fast walking. Sighing is also a key guiding symptom for Ignatia.

I often also prescribe homeopathic progesterone for women who present with symptoms of oestrogen/progesterone imbalance. Taken as a homeopathic remedy, progesterone is a safe, non-toxic hormone balancer and works well alongside other homeopathic remedies and supplements.

BUYING AND TAKING HOMEOPATHIC REMEDIES

I generally prescribe homeopathic remedies twice daily for three days and then wait and let the remedy work. As a qualified Homeopath I use a variety of potencies which are often much higher than those available in shops, however, if you want to buy the remedies yourself 30c is a good option. Many of the remedies are available from Green's Healthfoods in Leigh-On-Sea or you can order them directly from Helios Homeopathy. When taking a homeopathic remedy, just pop it under your tongue and suck it. They need to be taken at least 15 minutes away from eating or drinking (except water), and cleaning your teeth as they can be antidoted by strong tastes.

SUPPLEMENTS

I always assess each woman individually and tailor supplements, dietary advice and homeopathic remedies to suit her unique set of symptoms. However, I have found the following combination of supplements particularly helpful for women with PMS:

Vitex Agnus Castus is a herb that has been used to support women's health for centuries. Studies show that it can help alleviate premenstrual breast tenderness, fluid retention, constipation, irritability, anger, depressed mood, fluctuations in mood and headaches. This has also been my experience using it with women in my practice.

Evening Primrose Oil can be helpful for breast tenderness, bloating, acne, water retention, depression, foggy thinking, irritability and headaches prior to periods. The scientific evidence regarding the effectiveness is conflicting, partly due to the study designs, however, in my clients taking evening primrose oil there have been significant improvements.

Magnesium is a wonderfully calming mineral helping to alleviate tension. It has been found that women with PMS have lower levels of red blood cell magnesium than those women who don't suffer with PMS. Magnesium levels are depleted when we feel stressed and by drinking alcohol

A good quality multi vitamin and mineral This is to provide chromium, B vitamins and zinc for blood sugar support. B vitamins also support mood and are used up by the body more quickly when we are stressed. Nutrients work in a synergistic way and studies have found, for example, that Vitamin B6 and magnesium are more effective when taken together.

Other supplements that have found to be helpful include calcium, Vitamin E and grapeseed.

Time Out

In the busy times in which we live our monthly cycle is often considered an inconvenience, however, in times gone by it is a process that was respected and honoured. It can be helpful to accept that physically and emotionally our bodies have different needs throughout our cycle and to try and tune in to and honour these needs to make our journey a little easier.

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NATURES AID PREEMEEZE® AGNUS CASTUS 400MG

It is normal to experience mild premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms in the two weeks before menstruation starts. PMS most commonly affects women aged between 30 and 40 years of age, however, it can affect women at any age, even those under 20 years old. Natures Aid PremEeze® Agnus Castus is used to help relieve premenstrual symptoms such as irritability, mood swings, breast tenderness, bloating and menstrual cramps. Each Natures Aid PremEeze® hard capsule contains 400mg of Agnus Castus fruit (*Vitex agnus-castus* L.).

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Evening primrose oil is one of the few natural sources of an Omega 6 fatty acid called Gamma-Linolenic Acid (GLA). Evening primrose is widely recommended for use by women during their monthly cycle as well as for women going through the menopause.

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PMS cravings - indulge guilt-free!

Most women will be familiar with the word 'cravings' during that time of the month - and more often than not, it goes with 'chocolate'!

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