PMS
What You Can Do to Ease Your Symptoms

What is PMS?
PMS (premenstrual syndrome) is a group of symptoms that start 7 to 14 days before your period. The symptoms usually stop soon after your period begins. If you’re going through menopause, you may have symptoms during and after your period.

Most women feel some discomfort before their periods. But if you have PMS, you may feel so anxious, depressed or uncomfortable that you can’t cope at home or at work.

What causes PMS?
No one knows for sure. But PMS seems to be linked in part to changes in hormone levels during the menstrual cycle. PMS is not caused by stress or psychological problems, though these may make the symptoms of PMS worse.

What are the symptoms of PMS?
Symptoms may include any of the following (some months may be worse than others):

- Crying spells, mood swings or feeling more sensitive than usual
- Bloated abdomen, constipation
- Weight gain, swollen hands and feet
- Feeling hungry, or craving sugar, salt or chocolate
- Acne
- Feeling anxious, irritable, tense or angry
- Feeling tired or having trouble sleeping
- Tender and swollen breasts
- Headache or joint pain
- Not feeling as interested in sex or not getting as much pleasure from it
- Dizziness or fast heartbeat
- Trouble concentrating
- Depression or wanting to be alone
- Thoughts of suicide

How do you know if you have PMS?
Your doctor may ask you to keep track of your symptoms on a calendar. If your symptoms follow the same pattern each month, you may have PMS.

Your doctor may also want to:
- Examine you and do some tests to rule out other problems.
- Talk with you about your eating and exercise habits, your work, and your family relationships. This will help your doctor prescribe the best treatment for you.

How is PMS treated?
That depends on your symptoms. There is no cure for PMS. But your doctor may recommend or prescribe medicine to help your symptoms, such as the following:

- Non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines to relieve pain and other symptoms. These usually combine aspirin or acetaminophen with caffeine, antihistamines or diuretics. Examples are Midol and Pamprin.
- Prostaglandin inhibitors, to help ease symptoms like cramps and headache. Some of these, such as ibuprofen, can be bought without a prescription.
- Diuretics, to help your body get rid of extra sodium and fluid. This can ease bloating, weight gain, breast pain and abdominal pain.
- Antidepressants and medicine to treat anxiety, severe irritability or depression that some women have with PMS.
- Female hormones, to help relieve anxiety, depression, and breast swelling.
- Other medicines that are shown to relieve specific symptoms.

Always talk with your doctor, even about trying over-the-counter medicines. You may need to try more than one medicine to find the treatment that works for you.

Continued
What about vitamins and other home remedies?
Again, talk with your doctor before trying anything new. This includes things such as vitamins and other supplements (calcium, magnesium, tryptophan, etc.) Although these remedies do seem to help some women, they may also have side effects if you take too much of them. That’s why it’s best to discuss them with your doctor if you are thinking about trying them.

Will I always have PMS?
PMS usually goes away by itself before you reach menopause. It also goes away during pregnancy and after menopause.

Can I do anything to ease my symptoms?
Yes. See the box on the right for some tips on controlling your symptoms. Know what your PMS symptoms are and when they happen. Then you can change your diet, exercise and schedule to get through each month as smoothly as possible.

While these things aren’t guaranteed to work for you, they have worked for many women.

---

### Tips on controlling PMS

- Eat complex carbohydrates (such as whole grain breads, pasta and cereals), fiber and protein. Avoid sugar and fat.
- Avoid salt for the last few days before your period to reduce bloating and fluid retention.
- Cut back on caffeine to feel less tense and irritable and to ease breast soreness. If caffeine affects you a lot, you may need to cut it out completely.
- Cut out alcohol. Drinking it before your period can make you feel more depressed.
- Try eating up to 6 small meals a day instead of 3 larger ones.
- Get aerobic exercise. Work up to four 20-minute periods a week. Exercising even more often the week before your period may also help.
- Get plenty of sleep, about 8 hours a night.
- Keep to a regular schedule of meals, bedtime and exercise.
- Try to schedule stressful events for the week after your period.
- Join a support group of women with PMS.