



Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)

What is PMS?

Premenstrual Syndrome refers to symptoms (what you experience) that occur in the week before your period. For most people, the symptoms stop within the first 1-2 days of menstrual bleeding, and can last a total of 1-10 days. Common symptoms include: mood changes, breast pain, acne, bloating (swelling, feeling full of gas), food cravings, and tiredness. There are many symptoms of PMS, and you do not need to have a specific number to have PMS. Many people (80-90%) who are menstruating will experience symptoms leading up to their period. Some people will find these symptoms uncomfortable and bothersome enough to interfere with their daily life

What is PMDD?

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder is a severe form of PMS and is diagnosed when you have 5 symptoms (1 of which must be a mood change - depression, anxiety, mood fluctuations, irritability/anger) in the week before your period. These symptoms occur for at least 2 periods in a row, and are not related to other health problems. The difference between PMS and PMDD is that with PMDD the symptoms have a significant impact on your life - you are missing school, work, social activities, or are affecting your relationships. People with anxiety or depression can also have PMDD.

Should you track your cycle?

It is important to track your menstrual cycle, as it is an important indicator of health. As PMS has many symptoms, it is helpful for you to write what you're experiencing and consider rating how you feel as mild, moderate or severe. You want to identify the symptoms that are causing difficulty for you. Some people will use a menstrual tracker app, and many free options are available online. Some people may choose to track on a paper calendar. There are many free apps available, ask your provider for their favorites!

Are there any tests to diagnose PMS or PMDD?

There is no specific lab work or ultrasound that helps with diagnosis. The symptoms are caused by your body's response to your normal hormones. PMS and PMDD are diagnosed based on your symptoms. Your health care practitioner may order lab work to make sure there is not another cause of some of your symptoms, such as iron deficiency or anemia.

Is there a cure for PMS and PMDD?

While there is no cure for PMS or PMDD, working with your provider will allow you to try approaches that can prevent or manage the symptoms you experience.

Will changing my lifestyle help?

Lifestyle changes have not been proven to prevent or treat PMS/PMDD, however healthy active living may help you feel better. This includes a well balanced diet and drinking plenty of water. Also, limiting sugar and salt rich foods, alcohol, and caffeine. Getting adequate sleep is important, with a goal of 8 hours for most people. Your sleep can also be helped by staying organized, reducing stress, and getting regular exercise. Physical activity, 30-60 minutes per day, 4 to 6 times per week, is recommended.

Will antidepressants help?

Several types of medications commonly used to treat depression are also very effective at treating PMS/PMDD. (such as fluoxetine, sertraline and venlafaxine). When used to treat PMS/PMDD they can be taken as different regimens:

1. Daily
2. Starting just before the expected PMS/PMDD symptoms begin (can be up to 14 days)
3. "Symptom start" dosing where the medication is started on the first day of PMS/PMDD symptoms

Your healthcare provider can help you determine which regimen is best. These medications improve mood symptoms, and may not improve physical symptoms. While some people may be hesitant to consider antidepressant medication, these medications are safe and are the most effective treatment to improve mood symptoms of PMS/PMDD.

Will hormones help?

Your health care provider may offer hormonal treatment to help with your PMS/PMDD. Hormones, including birth control pills, patch, ring, progestin injection, or progestin subdermal implant work to stop ovulation, and may improve symptoms by keeping your hormones stable throughout the month. People who need birth control may choose to first try this option instead of antidepressants. Hormone users may also have lighter periods and less pain, which could be another reason to choose this option. It is safe to skip periods while on hormones, and this may further improve your symptoms.

Are there specific medications that help with my symptoms?

Some people may choose to treat the symptoms that are most bothersome - using a mild diuretic for bloating (spironolactone) or pain management for breast pain (NSAIDs - ibuprofen, naproxen). Your healthcare provider may discuss additional supplements with you. No single supplement has been proven effective.

Will counseling help?

Please let your healthcare provider know if you are experiencing low mood or are worrying so much that it is preventing you from going to school or from interacting with friends and family. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a type of counseling that is effective for depression and anxiety, and may be helpful with the physical and emotional discomforts of PMS/PMDD.

What do I do if these treatments don't work?

If PMS/PMDD is still interfering with your life, please talk with your healthcare provider to consider a different approach that may work better for you.

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