

Pre-Menstrual Syndrome

What is PMS?

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is a group of symptoms related to the menstrual cycle. PMS symptoms can occur a few days or a couple of weeks before your period. The symptoms usually go away after your period starts.

What causes PMS?

Hormonal imbalance is believed to be a major precipitating cause of PMS symptoms. Most women who experience PMS symptoms have elevated levels of the hormone estrogen, in relation to the levels of progesterone. This imbalance can be caused from nutritional problems and digestive disorders to exposure to estrogen-like chemicals in the environment and inadequate liver detoxification.

What are PMS symptoms?

PMS often includes both physical and emotional symptoms. Some typical symptoms include:

- Decreased energy
- Tension
- Irritability
- Depression
- Headache
- Altered sex drive
- Breast pain
- Backache
- Abdominal bloating
- Swelling of fingers and ankles

How common is PMS?

Approximately 40% of all menstruating women experience PMS symptoms. Twelve percent of these women may suffer from a debilitating form of PMS, affecting work, school and home life.

How is PMS diagnosed?

Diagnosis of PMS is usually based on your symptoms, when they occur, and how much they affect your life. A PMS questionnaire may be filled out, and lab tests may be ordered as needed, to determine which specific type of PMS you may have.

How is PMS treated naturopathically?

Every woman experiences PMS symptoms differently, so each treatment plan is individualized. A whole-foods diet is generally prescribed, along with supplements to help balance fluctuating hormone levels. Your naturopath will also select from botanical medicines, homeopathy, and/or acupuncture to aid digestion and liver function, while reducing symptoms.

General dietary guidelines to reduce PMS symptoms are as follows:

- Limit refined carbohydrates
- Increase protein intake, specifically from legumes
- Reduce milk and dairy products
- Decrease intake of saturated fats
- Increase intake of vegetable fats (olive, sunflower, fish oils)
- Eat lots of green leafy vegetables
- Try to eat organic meats; fish is best
- Decrease salt intake
- Restrict alcohol and tobacco use
- Restrict methylxanthines such as coffee, tea, chocolate, caffeine-containing beverages and foods