

Premenstrual Syndrome and Diet

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) affects 66%-90% of women in at least one way (some bloating, mood swings, etc), but about 20% of women have more severe symptoms, with 8% suffering from premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). The following dietary tips may help.

Beverages

Cut back on caffeine. Caffeine can exacerbate mood swings and breast tenderness in the days leading up to your period. It may seem counterintuitive, but drinking more water actually can help to decrease the amount of bloating that you experience.

Calcium and vitamin D

Some studies have shown that women consuming the most calcium- and vitamin D-rich foods have the lowest incidence of PMS symptoms. Specifically, calcium is shown to decrease mood swings, headache, bloating, cramps, food cravings, and irritability. Vitamin D is found in milk, some soy milks, some cereals, some margarines, and some butters. Variable amounts are found in egg yolks and liver. Exposure of the face, arms, and hands to sunlight also will help you to reach your vitamin D quota.

Calcium is found in dark-green leafy vegetables, canned sardines and salmon, soybeans, fortified orange juice, most commercial bread, and dairy products.

Magnesium

Magnesium may relieve breast tenderness, mood swings, and bloating. Magnesium is found in brown rice, whole grains, legumes, cereal, dark-green vegetables, milk, wheat germ, nuts, and seeds.

Vitamin B₆

Vitamin B₆ may help to ease depression. The tolerable upper limit for vitamin B₆ is 100 milligrams (mg)/day. Some people recommend mega-dosing on B₆ to deal with PMS symptoms, but neurological problems can occur with doses higher than 100 mg. In addition, although some people attest to the powers of B₆, no scientific studies have ever found a firm correlation between this vitamin and reduction of PMS symptoms. Vitamin B₆ is found in meat, whole-grain products (especially wheat), vegetables, and nuts.

Vitamin E

Vitamin E may reduce the incidence of headaches and breast tenderness. Vitamin E is found in salad oils, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Alcohol

Alcohol can magnify depression and interrupt the sleep cycle. Avoid alcohol when you have PMS.

Fats

A diet that is high in saturated fat and *trans* fats may worsen PMS. Try eating good sources of omega-3 fatty acids, such as fish (salmon or tuna), or by using flaxseed oil in food preparation. Flaxseed also is shown to reduce breast soreness, probably owing to lignans, which are plant estrogens.

Carbohydrates

Eating more complex carbohydrates and fewer refined starches can keep blood sugar levels steadier, leading to fewer mood swings. Complex carbohydrates are found in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.

Fiber

Increasing fiber can help with the constipation that many women experience with PMS. It also may help to keep blood sugar levels steady.

Small meals

Try eating six small meals/day to keep cravings at bay. This also helps to keep your blood sugar level steady.

Low-fat vegetarian diet

Some studies show that a low-fat vegetarian diet helps to reduce dysmenorrhea duration and intensity, and duration of PMS symptoms.

Tryptophan

Eating foods rich in tryptophan will help to increase serotonin production, and will help to ease the anxiety and depression that can occur with PMS. Tryptophan is found in chicken, yellowfin tuna, scallops, spinach, tofu, asparagus, broccoli, milk, beans, lentils, bulgur wheat, green beans, brussels sprouts, eggs, mozzarella cheese, soybeans, lean beef, lamb, turkey breast, halibut, shrimp, snapper, and salmon.

Sodium

Aim to keep your sodium intake at or below 2000 mg/day for the week leading up to your period. This helps to reduce bloating.

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