

Nutrition and Premenstrual Syndrome

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Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) is a complex disorder experienced by women characterized by numerous emotional and physical symptoms. Twenty years ago there was little evidence and research conducted on this topic, however, two decades later there seems to be more information available in terms of nutritional recommendations to follow which may alleviate some of the uncomfortable symptoms.

Depending upon the symptoms experienced, there are different recommendations to follow in order to alleviate symptoms. Hypoglycemia or “low-blood-sugar” is a common symptom reported in women with PMS. During an entire menstrual cycle, women will feel fine and then 3-5 days before the onset of menstruation, dizziness, shakiness, fatigue, and uncommon headaches will emerge. What is a woman to do?

It is recommended to eat smaller meals and to eat more frequently throughout the day. Protein rather than carbohydrates should be increased and simple sugars such as those found in sweet desserts should try and be avoided altogether. Caffeine should also be decreased, but not entirely, especially if you are used to drinking it regularly. Instead try cutting back to half the amount of caffeine you would normally consume.

The cravings which occur during PMS usually include but are not limited to sugar, starches, chocolate and salt. Ironically, these are the foods which need to be minimized during this time. One of the theories behind the chocolate craving is that there may be a magnesium deficiency and therefore, a magnesium supplement may be beneficial for some women. Magnesium also enhances vitamin B-6 absorption.

Another symptom experienced by women with PMS is irritability and mood swings. The B vitamins, especially vitamin B-6, have been shown to yield some positive results with these symptoms. Also a diet high in folic acid and dark green leafy vegetables energize rather than deplete the women suffering from fatigue and mood swings. Vitamin E may help to diminish anxiety and depression; however recent research in the field of vitamin E has shown a negative correlation with heart disease and it is therefore recommended to check with your doctor before supplementing with this vitamin. More recent studies have shown that double doses of calcium and vitamin D can help diminish symptoms of depression. Complex carbohydrates increase serotonin, a neurotransmitter in the brain, and that is the theory as to why women may crave carbohydrates during this time. Serotonin calms the body down and relaxes the mind. Healthy complex carbohydrates which energize the body are lentils, whole rye, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, oats, beans and barley. Some people are very sensitive to white flour, wheat and corn and so it is advised to be your own best guide.



NUTRITIONAL HEALING *for Health & Well-Being*

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Evening primrose oil has been helpful to women who suffer from premenstrual breast pain. Alternative medicines such as homeopathy, aromatherapy, naturopathy and herbs have all helped some women in reducing unwanted symptoms. Many of these suggestions are trial and error and each woman needs to find out what works best for her.

To summarize, eating a diet rich in vegetable, lean protein, healthy carbohydrates, low sugar, minimal caffeine, minimal sodium, smaller meals more frequently, and supplementing with certain vitamins and minerals is the healthy way to go for women suffering from PMS. Other alternative therapies including physical activity and stress reducers such as yoga and meditation may all help to diminish symptoms.

