

Pre-Menstrual Syndrome

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PMS. Just the acronym for "Pre-Menstrual Syndrome" brings to mind anything from jokes to bad memories. Few of us have been unaffected by the symptoms suffered by a loved one or co-worker. The good news is, it can be effectively treated.

Pre-menstrual tension refers to a broad range of symptoms suffered by some women from one day to two weeks before her menses starts. They can include depression, sadness, irritability, clumsiness, abdominal and breast distention and pain, backaches, headaches, anxiety, cramps, insomnia, crying, and outbursts of anger.

It is estimated that 70-75% of women in this country have PMS at some time, 5% are incapacitated by their symptoms, and 30-40% report symptoms that interfere at some level with their daily lives.

Emotional strain, especially over a long period of time, is the most common cause of PMS. Excessive consumption of greasy foods and dairy products leads to the formation of phlegm, and if combined with emotional strain, can make symptoms even more severe. Overwork can weaken Qi (energy) and contribute to symptoms. The lack of quality foods, an inability to digest foods properly, or dehydration are often factors.

Both acupuncture and herbs can very successfully treat pre-menstrual tension. If phlegm accumulation is part of the diagnosis, treatment will take longer. Most cases can be completely resolved within three months of weekly visits, but improvement will likely be noted within the first month.

Mild to moderate exercise is most helpful, though it is beneficial to rest more during the first few days of the menses. Even walking only 1/2 mile per day can be beneficial. Exercise helps to stabilize hormonal levels, aids in nutrient absorption, and increases the blood oxygen level.

Reduce greasy foods and dairy products, eat easy-to-digest foods if you have digestive problems, and drink at least two quarts of water per day. Reduce coffee and tea, even if they are decaffeinated. Studies have shown that women who regularly consume caffeine are four times more likely to have severe PMS.

Complex carbohydrates may be helpful, such as fiber, starches, vegetables, whole grains, peas, and beans. Chicken, turkey and fish may be helpful. Try eliminating red meat. Avoid refined and processed foods including pop, desserts, candy and other sugars, even if only while you're experiencing symptoms.

See your doctor to rule out thyroid imbalances, allergies, immune systems disorders, hypoglycemia, and diabetes.

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