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Pms and Women's Health

By Julie Parker

*A self-help guide to manage and
treat Pre-menstrual Syndrome*

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About the Author

Julie Parker was surprised with the number of women that she talked with who had almost no knowledge about this subject, its effects on their social and business lives as well as their general health or had bad information which, in some cases, could have caused serious problems for them.

Julie is, in her words, "an average woman without special training", but she has done some careful research for her book in the hope that it will help as many other women as possible to deal with PMS so that they can minimize any negative effect that it has on their social and business lives.

Read this book and also consult your doctor. Then, you will be able to be happier and more productive every day for the rest of your life.

Part-I: Introduction

1. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) – An Overview

Premenstrual syndrome is a disorder in women that occurs due to various hormonal changes. It is common among women from their twenties to their forties.

This syndrome activates many disruptive symptoms up to a fortnight before the start of menstruation. In most women, these symptoms disappear after the onset of menstrual periods while some have it until the end of their period.

Symptoms of Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) are a culmination of psychological, physical and emotional disturbances. The hormonal changes affect a women's emotional setup extensively and a very common outcome is irritability.

Some complain of severe headaches, painful joints, abdominal cramping, panic, fatigue, depression, backache, anxiousness, heart palpitations, fluid retention, constipation, decreased work performance, lack of coordination and uncontrollable spells of crying.

Not all symptoms manifest in every woman suffering from PMS.

Since PMS symptoms occur due to hormonal changes, they commonly appear at the start of puberty, when first taking birth control pills, after pregnancy, at the onset of menopause or during hormone-related surgery (such as tubal ligation or hysterectomy.)

PMS symptoms are often regarded as being inherited from mothers, but the individual's symptoms could differ.

Just before PMS occurs, you might feel increased energy levels making you more active than normal. You may be able to clear all piled-up work and have sufficient energy to cope with huge workloads.

Sleep around this time is normally low. However, with the onset of PMS, you lose all your extra energy and may be unable to cope with even simple chores.

You do not seem to have any control over your feelings and actions. In some women, PMS manifests so extensively that they need to take time off their regular office or school routine and rest at home.

Although hormonal changes are the main cause for PMS, it is not clear why some women experience unbearable symptoms while some experience none.

Estrogen, the female hormone, starts rising soon after menstruation and peaks around the mid-ovulation period, about a fortnight ahead of the next menstrual cycle. It falls sharply after that, then rises again slowly, and falls just before the start of the next menstruation.

Varying levels of estrogen may have many effects:

Fluid retention which many women believe causes an increase in weight before menstrual periods.

A neurological effect causing increased brain activity believed to sometimes lead to seizures.

A drop in blood sugar levels.

PMS in the post-pregnancy period could cause severe depression to the extent that some women inflict harm on themselves and, sometimes, even their newborn infants.

PMS symptoms are usually manageable. Carefully following your doctor's diet control tips coupled with regular exercise like walking, aerobics, swimming, jogging, and cycling can offer substantial relief from symptoms and better control over PMS.

Regular small meals, with a high carbohydrate content, every three hours maintain blood glucose levels and restrict sudden spurts of energy.

Additionally, a regular intake of supplemental vitamins and minerals may bring relief from symptoms like joint aches, fatigue, depression and irritability.

Staying away from alcohol, caffeine, fats, salts and simple sugars may reduce depression, fatigue or tension.

Part-II : Understanding PMS

2. What is PMS?

PMS is the abbreviation for Pre-Menstrual Syndrome. PMS is a culmination of various debilitating symptoms associated with the menstrual cycle of women.

PMS is rampant among eighty to ninety percent of menstruating women. Although scientists mostly think that PMS is due to hormonal changes, there are a few who do not agree.

Some women experience long spells of PMS-related symptoms extending over a week or more, while others have short spells with some as short as just a few hours. There are also some women who do not experience any PMS at all.

In most cases, PMS starts a fortnight ahead of your menstrual periods. It shows as different symptoms and usually disappears with the start of menses. Occasionally, it could be present for a day after the start of menses or persist until the period ends.

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder

Sometimes, severe PMS causes another serious condition, **premenstrual dysphoric disorder** or **PMDD**. The conditions are not the same thing; women with PMDD experience very serious complications and extensive emotional upsets. Comparatively, PMS is milder and of lesser duration than PMDD.

The Four Types of PMS

PMS is divided into four main subgroups; PMS Type A, PMS Type H, PMS Type C and PMS Type D.

PMS Type A is the most common.

Every group has separate characteristic symptoms.

PMS Type D may be dangerous as it can cause serious suicidal intentions due to extreme depression and forgetfulness. However, existence of this PMS subgroup is very rare.

3. Who Is Affected by PMS?

Premenstrual syndrome symptoms affect more than 85% of women between the ages of twenty and forty. The frequency of symptoms is high among women in their twenties and thirties.

Symptoms are more severe in women with a history of depression in their families and if they have a single child.

Further, some PMS symptoms are more prevalent in specific ethnic groups. More women in Asia and Europe suffer from problems like breast pain, swelling and backaches while those in the United States may have more mood swings, weight gain, irritability and tension.

PMS symptoms disrupt normal activities in about thirty to forty percent of women experiencing PMS. However, PMS is uncommon among teenage girls.

4. Cause of Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

There are no established facts about what causes premenstrual syndrome. Scientists and researchers put forth various theories about what could cause premenstrual syndrome. Although many think that a major cause is hormonal changes occurring before the start of periods, there is no conclusive answer as to why some women experience severe symptoms while some do not experience anything at all despite hormonal changes occurring in all of them.

The menstrual cycle starts from the first day of your menses. Premenstrual syndrome manifests in the latter half of the menstrual cycle; the fortnight before the start of your menstrual period.

This is the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle, from the fourteenth day of the cycle to the twenty-eighth day.

The luteal phase starts with the release of an egg from the ovary and different hormones cause the lining of the uterus to become thick and spongy.

Around the same time, progesterone levels rise while estrogen levels start dropping. This shift in hormone levels may cause PMS.

Although ovulation triggers different PMS symptoms, it alone is not the cause for all PMS symptoms.

Causes of Premenstrual Syndrome

Your body's nervous system releases certain endorphins that are responsible for generating happy and satisfied feelings within you. Endorphins also reduce the effect of any pain. These endorphins normally circulate within your body and maintain equilibrium of your feelings.

However, during the luteal phase, endorphin levels fall drastically in some women. This causes pain, uneasiness and nausea, which are common PMS symptoms.

The increased progesterone levels affect normal nervous system functioning. It hinders the usual relaxation pattern of your brain. This causes anxiousness, irritability, restlessness, and tension.

Imbalance in your hormone levels can affect the kidneys which, in turn, cause fluids and salts to remain in your body. These increases in fluid levels causes weight gain and certain negative self-perceptions that affect you emotionally. Such emotional disturbances are common in PMS.

Disturbances in emotional balances, physical unrest and pain cause dietary changes; you do not eat your usual amounts of good, nutritious food.

Instead, you crave and eat unhealthy foods.

This causes vitamin levels in your body to drop, specifically vitamin B6, vitamin A, and vitamin E. Low vitamin levels make you feel tired and emotionally drained. Low levels of essential minerals like calcium and magnesium also cause such disturbances.

Progesterone levels affect insulin and blood sugar levels. This causes a craving for soda and candy, a common PMS symptom.

This can lead to serious disruptions in your blood sugar levels. Low blood sugar levels cause severe irritability and spells of crying, which commonly occur during PMS.

Prostaglandins are inflammatory substances produced in specific areas like the reproductive tracts, brain, breast, gastrointestinal tract and kidney.

Your body produces more of these substances during the luteal phase, probably due to hormonal misbalance. This leads to breast tenderness, diarrhea, gas, constipation and cramping, which are common PMS symptoms.

Serotonin is a brain chemical that regulates mood changes and your sensitivity to pain. Normally, women with PMS have low serotonin levels and therefore suffer from bouts of depression. These bouts intensify during the luteal phase.

Your **Lifestyle** is also an important factor in the effect of PMS symptoms. Women who smoke, consume a lot of alcohol, lead stressful lives, lack regular physical exercises and consume a diet rich in caffeine, red meat, salt, and sugary foods are almost guaranteed to fall prey to PMS symptoms.

Women on birth control pills often complain of various PMS symptoms. However, some women find relief from PMS symptoms when starting on them.

Intake of birth control pills could act as a trigger for PMS symptoms in a few cases.

5. Signs and Symptoms of Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

Premenstrual syndrome symptoms are many, and different women experience different symptoms. But, their PMS symptoms are the same for every cycle, although severity levels could change from cycle to cycle. Sometimes, you may not experience any PMS symptoms at all.

Common Symptoms include:

Irritability with high-tension: PMS makes you feel irritated and anxious for no apparent reason. You become tense at the slightest disturbance. You cannot withstand excessive noise and lose your temper over minor issues.

Fatigue: This is a very common PMS symptom. You feel excessively drained of all energy and doing regular chores seems a huge task.

Sleep Disturbances: Sleep disturbances are a common occurrence during PMS. You find it difficult to fall asleep. Sometimes, you oversleep and are unable to wake up early the next morning.

Anger: Angry feelings are more extreme due to PMS. You tend to argue with everyone about everything. You snap at the slightest thing and are provoked for no real reason.

Concentration Problems: During PMS, you find it difficult to concentrate even on small issues like following a recipe. You become absent minded and tend to forget routine matters.

Food cravings: You feel special cravings for salty or sweet food items. Your normal appetite also seems to be greater than usual.

Depression: PMS makes you feel sad and unhappy. You may become extremely depressed and cry inconsolably. You feel

hopeless. You remain disinterested about even doing your usual, essential activities at your home or place of work.

Fluid Retention: Women with PMS could register a gain in body weight, specifically around the abdomen, legs and hands. You may feel puffed up. This is due to excessive fluid retention within your body and an increase in your body's salt levels.

Headaches: This is a very common symptom of PMS. Women with PMS disorders often complain of severe headaches that have a long duration.

Mood Swings: Women with PMS experience severe mood swings. One minute, you are happy and cheerful while, the next moment, you feel very sad and depressed for no specific reason.

Physical symptoms: Backaches, pain in your joints and abdominal cramps are common occurrences. These symptoms could make you feel physically exhausted.

Some women could experience very serious PMS symptoms and severe psychiatric disorders that could need psychiatric counseling.

This may be a disorder called premenstrual dysphoric disorder or PMDD. It could trigger suicidal tendencies and sufferers become more aggressive than usual. It could also induce criminal tendencies. These are very rare instances but they require immediate treatment.

6. What Happens in Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)?

Premenstrual syndrome is believed to be the result of various natural hormonal changes occurring in your body. Body reactions to hormonal changes are not the same for every woman.

So, PMS manifests differently in different women; some experience severe symptoms while some do not experience anything at all.

How Premenstrual Syndrome Happens

PMS is believed to be the result of changes in your endocrine system due to regular ovulation. Ovulation normally starts from the tenth to fourteenth day of the menstrual cycle and extends until the twenty-second or twenty-eighth day.

Different women have different menstrual cycles and ovulation varies in individual menstrual cycles.

Ovulation is part of the reproductive process. The pituitary gland, hypothalamus, adrenal glands, thyroid gland and ovaries coordinate together to produce an egg or ovum.

These body organs also prepare your body for a possible pregnancy if the produced egg is fertilized.

The different glands send chemical signals to all body parts. These chemical signals are responsible for changes in your emotional quotients, energy levels, mood changes, pain perceptions, body fluid and weight, and your ability to think properly.

Chemical signals are in the form of neurotransmitters and hormones. Improper coordination between different systems and parts of your body could cause a variety of PMS symptoms.

Processes and Changes in a Menstrual Cycle

Every menstrual cycle is a complete process of production of an egg for fertilization. The single egg travels from ovaries to uterus through fallopian tubes. Meanwhile, the uterus starts to develop a thick lining along its walls to offer maximum support and protection to the egg if it gets fertilized.

If the egg reaches uterus and gets fertilized by a sperm cell, it gets support by attaching itself within the soft, cushioned and specially-developed uterus walls.

However, if fertilization does not take place and the egg just passes out, then the uterus no longer requires the extra, cushioned lining. The extra tissue and blood that formed this special uterus wall passes out through the vagina in the form of menses during your menstrual period.

This cycle repeats itself every month all through your reproductive years.

Occurrence of Premenstrual Syndrome Symptoms

The entire process of ovulation can cause erratic changes in moods. Body responses to the changes are not the same for every woman. Estrogen and progesterone hormone levels in your body are not the same at all times. Varying levels cause emotional disturbances and physical pain like headaches, body aches, anger, cramps, nausea, food cravings, uneasiness, restlessness, depression and other PMS symptoms.

Endorphins and Serotonin

Further, your brain releases special chemicals in the form of endorphins and serotonin. **Endorphins** are natural pain-killers while **serotonin** provides a feeling of happiness.

Varying levels of these important chemicals may make you feel immense pain or feel low and out of spirits. These are common PMS symptoms.

7. What are the Risk Factors of PMS?

It is not conclusive what factors will necessarily cause PMS symptoms. You could develop PMS symptoms even without the existence of any of the listed supposed risk factors. Research is continuing.

Possible Risk Factors of PMS

Stress: Women leading stressful lives, either in their professional or personal sphere, are more prone to PMS symptoms. Mental stress may cause more problems than physical stress.

Heredity: PMS symptoms often travel from mothers to daughters, although intensity and the mix of symptoms may differ.

Age: PMS symptoms are more pronounced and occur with greater frequency in women between the ages of twenty and forty.

Depression and Psychological Disorders: Women suffering from depression, anxiety or other psychological disorders are more vulnerable to PMS symptoms.

Dietary Factors: PMS symptoms are more evident in women that have food rich in salt or sugar. Salty foods may drain away body water levels while sugary foods are thought by some to be responsible for severe mood changes and overall fatigue.

Low vitamin levels in your body, especially manganese, magnesium and vitamin E, may increase your risk of developing PMS symptoms.

Excessive caffeine and alcohol intake is equally harmful.

Sedentary Lifestyle: Lack of regular physical exercise is believed to be another important risk factor for PMS.

8. Common Myths and Misconceptions about PMS

Myths and misconceptions abound regarding PMS. This is mainly due to lack of sufficient firm information and knowledge.

The most common myths include:

Some people, mostly men, consider it to be a regular part of menstrual cycle. Although it manifests in some women, others do not experience any discomfort at all

There is nothing that can be done to alleviate the symptoms

You can correct most PMS symptoms to some degree through proper dietary changes. Lack of sufficient vitamins and minerals can make you vulnerable to PMS symptoms.

Mood changes are due to PMS. These changes need not necessarily be due to PMS. Prevalent psychological disorders, stress, or other unrelated factors could aggravate the situation.

Maintaining your calm and leading an organized life can help to relieve some PMS symptoms to varying degrees.

PMS is contagious. These symptoms erupt by themselves due to factors within your own body.

Many women suffering from PMS symptoms are less creative, irrational, or difficult to work with. Not true. Women can remain equally creative and work responsibly with or without PMS symptoms.

PMS symptoms are a natural occurrence and you have to learn to live with it. Research indicates that PMS symptoms may be due to biological deficiencies and chemical imbalances. Facing

the problem correctly and efficiently can help you overcome most PMS symptoms.

Part-III: Diagnosis and Clinical Aspects

9. When to Seek Medical Advice

Pre-menstrual syndrome symptoms could cause serious debilitating situations.

Although many try managing the prevalent symptoms by themselves, it sometimes is imperative to seek medical advice and help.

Such situations include:

- 1) If self-treatment measures do not bring any relief and you are unable to attend to your normal routine due to PMS symptoms, you should consult your medical practitioner.
- 2) Specific PMS symptoms like depression, anxiety, mood swings or uncontrollable crying may not stop with the end of menstrual periods. In that case, you should visit a medical practitioner.
- 3) If your behavioral disorders turn dangerous, you might unknowingly try to harm yourself or others around you. Then, it is best to seek immediate medical help and advice.
- 4) If your PMS symptoms prove to be a major deterrent in your personal relationships, seek proper medical advice so that you can enjoy a happy and normal life with your partner.
- 5) If appropriate changes in lifestyle do not cause any improvement in the occurrence and frequency of PMS symptoms, you should take medical help and advice.

Before seeking medical advice for your PMS symptoms, it is a good idea to have maintained a regular diary of your symptoms;

frequency of occurrence, severity of symptoms and other important details.

This can help your doctor formulate a suitable plan for overcoming your PMS symptoms.

10. How Is Premenstrual Syndrome Diagnosed?

Premenstrual syndrome diagnosis is not easy, as most symptoms of PMS are common with many other ailments. Therefore, doctors apply a few strategies that help to clear away the possibility that your condition is due to the existence of other ailments.

Tests Used In PMS Diagnosis

Thyroid Test

Thyroid diseases are common among women in their reproductive years and the thyroid disease symptoms are similar to those of PMS; weight gain, bloating, fatigue etc.

So, your doctor will probably check your thyroid gland for any possible problems. If your thyroid is functioning normally, then the doctor can rule out the possibility of thyroid disease.

Physical Examination

Doctors conduct a physical examination to detect possible ailments that could cause the body aches, migraine headaches, anxiety, or other symptoms.

Some gynecological conditions like pelvic inflammatory disease, endometriosis or dysmenorrhea could cause similar symptoms. If doctors do not detect any ailments like tumor of the breast, brain or ovary or hypothyroidism after a thorough physical examination, your symptoms might indicate the presence of PMS.

Verbal Diagnosis

Doctors will ask about your:

- ? personal relationships
- ? professional commitments

- ? workload at home and/or workplace
- ? family atmosphere
- ? diet patterns
- ? lifestyle, and
- ? family medical history.

Excessive work pressure at home and the office could make you exhausted and extremely tired.

Difficult personal relationships or a complicated office atmosphere could cause depression.

These symptoms could intensify if you follow a very irregular diet pattern.

Alcohol consumption and smoking can add to your existing woes.

So, doctors try to analyze all these associated factors to see if positive changes in these areas can bring relief from your existing symptoms.

Basal Temperature

Basal temperature is the temperature of your body while at rest. Recording your basal temperature can provide accurate details of minute fluctuations in body temperatures. These fluctuations provide information about ovulation and menstruation cycles. Your doctor can determine if your ovulation is occurring normally.

There cannot be any PMS symptoms without proper ovulation and menstruation.

Maintain a Menstrual Diary

Your doctor may ask you to maintain a menstrual diary to record possible PMS symptoms over two to three months. This should

record all your symptoms like fatigue, nausea, depression, mood changes, headaches, body aches, irritability, and other possible PMS symptoms according to their time of occurrence, severity, and frequency.

Although not all the same symptoms may occur each month, it is possible to detect a trend. The menstrual diary helps your doctor make an accurate diagnosis and it also helps you understand your body and its functioning better. You become more prepared for possible outbursts or depression.

You can equip yourself and your family to have more control over the situation.

Laboratory Tests

Different laboratory tests and blood tests can detect other possible causes for your symptoms. Hypothyroidism, hypoglycemia, and other hormonal problems may be diagnosed through blood tests.

Diagnosis of PMS

Diagnosis of PMS is by ruling out other possible ailments.

Doctors can arrive at a firm diagnosis of PMS if:

- Your PMS symptoms occur specifically during the fortnight preceding your next menstrual period
- Most symptoms cease soon after start of your menstrual flow
- You remain symptom-free for a fortnight or so after start of menstrual flow
- Your symptoms incapacitate you and cause serious inconveniences in your daily life.

11. Medical History for PMS Diagnosis

Your medical history is an important indicator of possible PMS. It helps your doctor arrive at a firm conclusion.

Your medical history should include the following details:

- ? Menstrual history, indicating the start of your first menstruation period, start of problems like cramping, menstrual aches, and others
- ? Record of menstrual and ovulation dates every month, regularity of menstrual cycles and menstrual flow
- ? Pregnancy history indicating number of pregnancies, number of children, type of deliveries, and any complications in pregnancies and deliveries
- ? Birth control techniques in use and any complications due to use of birth control techniques
- ? Family medical history with details of PMS symptoms in close relatives
- ? History of any sexually transmitted diseases
- ? Family history of any mental ailments, especially among close relatives
- ? Any past episodes of anxiety attacks, depression, brain tumors, or any other disorders
- ? Any present mental ailments like panic attacks, attention deficit disorder, personality disorder, anxiety, or depression

- ? Any history of postpartum depression (depression after childbirth)
- ? Details about your lifestyle; your eating habits, intake of caffeinated beverages, alcohol consumption, smoking, and others
- ? Details about personal and professional relationships with incidences of any difficulties with spouse, coworkers or other family members
- ? Sleep patterns with any incidences of oversleeping, waking up at night and having late nights due to insomnia.

Importance of Your Medical History in PMS Diagnosis

Doctors often insist on a thorough, detailed medical history. This helps them understand your actual medical condition.

Menstruation can cause exaggeration of present ailments and symptoms could relate to other serious conditions. In this case, symptoms may not necessarily be due to PMS. They could be due to existing ailments that flare up during your menstrual periods. So, doctors require detailed medical history to confirm the presence of PMS and provide remedial measures.

Doctors review your medical history and then conduct a physical examination with pelvic examination and a Pap smear test. All these tests can help doctors diagnose the correct nature of your ailments.

No single test can currently confirm the presence of PMS.

12. Examinations and Tests for Diagnosing PMS

It is difficult to diagnose premenstrual syndrome, also called PMS, through a single test. There are certain points that must be known when carrying out the tests and examination for PMS (Premenstrual syndrome).

Diagnosis of a severe form of PMS or PMDD (premenstrual dysphoric disorder) is based mainly on a 2 or 3 cycle menstrual diary that records every day symptoms, ovulation days, menstruation days and other medical history.

There may be other conditions present that have symptoms like that of PMS. It is essential that you let your doctor decide the condition.

It will require more than a single visit to decide whether your symptoms are Premenstrual Syndrome.

At times, a thyroid stimulating hormone also causes symptoms like that of PMS, so you may need to have a blood test that shows whether you are free of the thyroid stimulating hormone.

Diagnosing PMS becomes difficult when a woman suffers from a worse condition during the last two weeks of the menstrual cycle.

All symptoms need to be carefully evaluated so they can be properly treated.

The right evaluation helps your doctor to prescribe the right treatment for you.

13. Prognosis of PMS

PMS symptoms can occur in women all through their reproductive years with different intensity levels. Normally, these symptoms end with the onset of menopause. A small percentage of women find relief in their late thirties.

Severe PMS symptoms can disrupt normal functioning. Therefore, take expert medical help and advice to help with problems.

Although medication may not give a permanent cure, it can provide necessary relief and help you tend to your regular chores.

You can take psychiatric help, if necessary.

Improve your lifestyle with better dietary control, regular physical and mental exercises, and reduce overall stress conditions to bring greater relief.

These changes can also reduce the frequency of PMS symptoms.

Part-IV: Treatment Options

14. How Is Premenstrual Syndrome Treated?

Premenstrual syndrome is common among more than 85% of menstruating women. Premenstrual syndrome is a combination of various physical and emotional symptoms that disrupt normal functioning.

There is no specific and permanent cure for premenstrual syndrome. You can make different lifestyle and dietary changes as well as use medication and simple treatments to reduce the severity of symptoms and get some relief.

Common Treatment Options for PMS

The basic requirement to start PMS treatment is to maintain a regular menstrual diary.

Make a note of all changes you notice in your body and emotions during your menstrual cycle for a minimum period of three months. This helps your doctor in advising the necessary course of treatment.

Doctors advise treatment options according to the severity of symptoms and the extent to which they hamper your normal living.

Common treatment options include:

- **Dietary changes:** Eat nutritious food with lots of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, pulses, and fibrous food. Eat three big and three small meals in a day. Fasting; not eating for long hours disturbs blood sugar levels and causes headaches and dizziness. But, refrain from eating sugary and salty foods, red meat and fatty

foods. Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake and quit smoking.

- **Lifestyle changes:** Make physical exercises like walking, jogging, swimming, and other aerobics an essential part of your daily routine. Exercise regularly, three to four times a week with a minimum of a half-hour per session. Exercise helps with the regulation of blood and oxygen flow within your body. This may reduce pain and improve your appetite. Adhere to a systematic lifestyle.
- **Stress:** Although stress does not cause PMS, it contributes towards the aggravation of the PMS symptoms present. Reduce mental and physical stress by practicing relaxation techniques like meditation, yoga, aromatherapy, biofeedback, having a warm bath with relaxing oils like lavender and menthol, listening to soothing music or going for a leisurely walk.
- **Vitamins:** Take regular calcium and vitamin B6 supplements. These are claimed to regulate functioning of the endocrine system and bring substantial relief from PMS symptoms like depression, abdominal pain, and cramps. Dosages should be only as directed by your physician. Unsupervised intake of specific vitamin supplements like B6 might cause severe nerve damage.
- **Medications:** Doctors often prescribe many **NSAIDs**, or **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs**, for relief from joint pains, headaches, and cramps. NSAIDs like

aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen may reduce backache, breast tenderness, and cramps. Antidepressants may help to relieve depression. Diuretics like spironolactone may reduce fluid retention. In some cases, oral contraceptives may provide relief from PMS symptoms, although there is no clear medical evidence to support this claim.

- **Information and Counseling:** Reassuring counseling and gaining essential information and knowledge about various PMS symptoms helps women to face them better. Further, gaining information can help you avoid all possible triggers of PMS symptoms and thereby improve your lifestyle and quality of life.

Advanced Treatment Options for PMS

If you continue to experience moderate to severe PMS symptoms after following common treatment options for two to three months, it is best to get expert medical advice for tackling your symptoms.

Advanced treatment options include:

- **SSRI:** SSRI refers to selective **serotonin reuptake inhibitor**. This is a special class of antidepressants that may help to control extreme cases of depression, anxiety, and aggression. Some women find excellent relief by taking SSRIs during premenstrual days. If you do not find relief with any specific SSRI, it may be a good option to try another SSRI before shifting to any other course of treatment as different women respond differently to specific SSRIs. It is best to take SSRIs according to the US Drug and Food Administration guidelines and only after consulting your doctor. SSRIs can be

taken with birth control pills. However, if you take an SSRI in isolation and become pregnant, some claim that it might cause birth defects. Consult your doctor for current information on this topic

- **Birth control pills:** Birth control pills with estrogen and drospirenone may prove an effective treatment option for PMS symptoms with some women. Drospirenone can reduce physical and emotional symptoms drastically and may also act like a diuretic which reduces bloating and ankle pain. However, doctors are not very much in favor of such pills as results are not consistent. Additionally, these pills could cause worse emotional symptoms than those of PMS. It could also increase risks of uterine cancer.
- **Benzodiazepine treatment with alprazolam:** This is a very strong treatment option. It could prove addictive and cause severe withdrawal symptoms. Doctors advise this treatment option only if you suffer from severe anxiety episodes during PMS and if all other treatment options have proved ineffective. The treatment duration should be very short and only under medical supervision.
- **Gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonists:** This is, again, a very rare treatment option for PMS. Doctors prescribe this only if your PMS symptoms are very severe and are similar to PMDD symptoms. This medication restricts the functioning of ovaries; it stops production of eggs. Hence, you could develop serious menopausal symptoms like vaginal dryness and hot flashes.

- **Surgery:** Surgical removal of ovaries, or oophorectomy, is a very rare treatment option for PMS symptoms. It promotes early menopause and may cause serious menopause symptoms like depression, vaginal dryness, hot flashes, and insomnia. Further, these symptoms could prove more severe than those occurring during natural menopause.

Although there are various available treatment options, no single therapy or treatment option can provide complete relief from PMS symptoms.

You need to discuss with your doctor suitable treatment options according to the severity of your symptoms (and your own physical and mental profile) and follow their advice closely so that you will benefit to the greatest possible degree.

15. Medications

Simple lifestyle changes with a few changes in your diet and eating pattern may deliver substantial relief from premenstrual syndrome symptoms.

However, if these fail to provide relief, your doctor could suggest medications that might help you to overcome pain, discomfort, depression and other PMS symptoms.

Medications for PMS symptoms may affect your endocrine system and restrict its working to stop production of specific chemicals or hormones. This may inhibit your PMS symptoms.

Since there is no cure for PMS symptoms, medications can provide relief to a great extent and help you lead a better life.

Medications for PMS Symptoms

NSAIDs

NSAIDs are **nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs**. These reduce inflammation, menstrual pain, cramps and decrease menstrual flow. You should start with NSAIDs a day or two before premenstrual pain starts and continue taking them regularly all through the premenstrual period. These can act as good pain-relievers. However, they do not provide any relief from breast tenderness or emotional symptoms.

Common NSAIDs include Naproxen, ibuprofen, or mefenamic acid which is available in Aleve, Motrin, Advil, or Ponstel.

SSRIs

SSRIs are **Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors**. SSRIs help increase serotonin levels. Serotonin is a brain chemical that

enhances your moods. Therefore, SSRIs can provide relief from emotional symptoms of PMS. You get relief from anxiety, restlessness, depression, irritability and aggression.

You should take SSRIs regularly during the premenstrual weeks. Common SSRIs include paroxetine, fluoxetine, sertraline, fluvoxamine, or citalopram which is available in Sarafem, Prozac, Paxil, Zoloft, Luvox, or Celexa.

Diuretics

PMS symptoms often cause fluid retention leading to bloating, discomfort in your breasts and swelling in ankles and joints. These cause pain, discomfort, and weight gain. Diuretics like spironolactone (containing aldactone) restrict your body's use of aldosterone. This reduces bloating and breast tenderness.

Drospirenone which is available in Yasmin is claimed to be another good diuretic.

Benzodiazepine

Alprazolam as in **Xanax** can provide relief from anxiety and depression. This medication may depress the central nervous system to relieve your anxious thoughts and depressed feelings. However, continuous use could make you addicted and you could suffer from serious withdrawal symptoms if you stop using it.

Birth Control Pills

YAZ and **Yasmin** are important birth control pills that provide excellent relief from PMS symptoms and, to an extent, also from PMDD. YAZ has very low estrogen while Yasmin has low estrogen. Drospirenone which is available in Yasmin also functions as a good diuretic.

Together, these birth control pills provide relief from severe physical and emotional symptoms of PMS and PMDD. Doctors do not recommend other birth control pills as most others accelerate emotional symptoms while providing relief from physical symptoms. Some might also increase the prospect of uterine cancer.

Danazol

Danocrine as present in **Danazol** is a synthetic male hormone. It reduces estrogen production and thereby provides relief from pain. However, it is not very popular as it cannot be used for a long period. It also may cause depression, nausea and cholesterol problems, deepening of voice, acne or oily skin, constriction of breasts, swelling in the feet and ankles and excessive weight gain.

Gonadotropin-releasing Hormone Agonist

Such medications consist of Synarel, Lupron Depot, or Zoladex. This medication is normally for severe PMDD symptoms. It causes reduction of ovary functioning, thereby inducing a menopausal stage. You could face menopausal symptoms like vaginal dryness and hot flashes.

Antidepressants

Some antidepressants like Anafranil, Elavil, and Tofranil may provide relief from depression and insomnia. However, they also cause serious side effects and therefore doctors refrain from prescribing them for treating PMS symptoms.

Propranolol

Inderal is claimed to be very effective for headaches and migraine induced by PMS symptoms. Propranolol is a common medication for heart ailments.

Bromocriptine

Parlodel reduces prolactin production and provides relief from breast pain. But, only take controlled and low dosages as it causes serious side effects of cramps, vomiting, nausea, fatigue and headaches.

Progesterone

Natural and synthetic progesterone are remedial medications for PMS symptoms. Natural progesterone is present in yams and soybeans. These are available as injections. Synthetic progesterone is available as tablets as in Duphaston. However, women are divided over its beneficial effects. Some find relief from PMS symptoms while some do not. Further, it may have side-effects like migraine, depression, acne, itchy skin, irregular periods, insomnia, epilepsy, hair loss and sometimes worsening of your current symptoms.

Bromocriptine

This is claimed to be effective at reducing breast pain as present in PMS symptoms. However, it may cause many side effects like dizziness, vomiting, nausea and low blood pressure.

Mefenamic Acid

This is claimed to be an efficient pain killer that provides relief from joint pains, muscular cramps, headaches and menstrual pain.

Before starting with medications for PMS symptoms, you should discuss all the facts with your doctor. Medication should be in accordance to severity and frequency of PMS symptoms. Different women experience different symptoms and therefore, no single medication can provide relief to all women suffering from PMS symptoms. Dosages should be carefully regulated. Some medications require continuous dosage through your premenstrual period while others could only be necessary at intervals.

Read and follow the directives of the US Food and Drug Administration and discuss all aspects with your doctor before starting with any of the prescribed medications. Although the FDA does not stop you from using these medicines, it issues warnings for your family members to take extra care while you are on specific medications as these could induce suicidal intentions.

Further, a few antidepressants increase chances of birth defects if you become pregnant while on the medication. Therefore, it is best to use birth control techniques while undergoing treatment for PMS symptoms.

16. SSRI for Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

SSRI refers to **Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor**. This is a type of medication that causes changes in use of the brain's neurotransmitter, serotonin.

SSRI is helpful in controlling various PMS symptoms like depression, chronic pain, irritability, mood swings, anger, headache, bloating, breast tenderness, joint and muscle pain, and anxiety. SSRI treatment during PMS may prove extremely effective in controlling most symptoms.

You may be able to continue with regular SSRI treatment to find relief if emotional symptoms persist even after menstrual cycle.

Common SSRIs include fluoxetine (as in Prozac and Sarafem), sertraline(in Zoloft), paroxetine (in Paxil), citalopram(in Celexa) and fluvoxamine in Luvox.

Different SSRIs suit different women differently and the extent of relief available to each will differ between the various SSRI's.

SSRI treatment could cause side effects like headache, nausea, fatigue, weight loss, insomnia, appetite changes, dizziness, anxiety, lowered libido and, in very rare cases, rashes.

It may be best to use birth control pills or other techniques during SSRI treatment. However, SSRIs are not believed to cause any birth defects even if you become pregnant while on treatment.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have issued customary advice to families of patients on antidepressants like SSRIs. Patients could develop suicidal tendencies, especially near the start of the treatment or during change of dosages. Although you do not have

to stop medications on noticing any abnormal behavior, it is necessary to contact your health professional for expert advice on any further course of action.

17. Surgical Treatments

It was not many years ago when surgery was the only solution for some women with severe premenstrual syndrome and premenstrual dysphoric disorder.

Through surgery, the uterus and the ovaries are removed and thus there is no menstrual cycle in the woman. These surgeries are called hysterectomy and oophorectomy, respectively.

Though the surgical removal of ovaries is controversial, there are still certain conditions where it may be considered necessary:

- Under circumstance where Premenstrual syndrome symptoms are severe enough to hamper the quality of a woman's life
- When the woman holds no plans for progeny and natural menopause is many years away from her actual age
- When all other treatment have not given satisfactory results

However, one point of concern here is that, though there are no premenstrual symptoms through oophorectomy, there is possibly an increased chance of osteoporosis in a woman and, therefore, it may be advisable that a woman without ovaries should take estrogen to protect her bones.

HRT or therapy of Estrogen progestin hormone replacement

With the therapy, the ovaries are removed but the uterus is not, because doing so reduces the uterine cancer risk.

ERT or therapy of Estrogen replacement: This therapy is used after the removal of both uterus and ovaries. The additional progestin is not needed when there is no uterus present.

Part-V: Prevention Measures and Coping Strategies

18. Can Premenstrual Syndrome Be Prevented?

Occurrence or start of PMS cannot be prevented. However, you can prevent aggravation of current symptoms and keep them under better control.

Preventive measures include:

Dietary changes: Increase your intake of calcium-rich foods like low-fat milk, yogurt, dark green leafy vegetables, tofu, cheese, broccoli, calcium-fortified juices, fruits, sardines, and salmon.

Refrain from consumption of refined sugar, sugary and salty foods like pickles, and chocolates.

Include lots of complex carbohydrates in your daily diet like whole grain breads, pastas, cereals, potatoes, brown rice, fresh fruits and vegetables - especially chickpeas and lentils.

Drink lots of water to flush out toxins and maintain the necessary fluid balance in the body.

Refined sugar and sugary foods can increase energy levels temporarily. However, within a few hours, your body metabolizes them and you feel very low and even worse than before.

Salty foods increase bloating due to excessive fluid retention.

Lifestyle changes: Maintain a regular exercise schedule of different aerobic exercises like walking, running, swimming and jogging.

Quit smoking and alcohol consumption and refrain from consuming caffeinated beverages like coffee, tea, colas, and cocoa products during premenstrual cycles.

Caffeinated beverages act as stimulants and increase your tension and anxiety levels. Further, they affect your sleep patterns, causing insufficient sleep. Poor sleep reflects on your physical and mental health. Consumption of alcohol acts as a depressant and could accelerate depression and the anxiety symptoms of PMS extensively.

Regular exercises helps to increase serotonin and endorphin levels in your brain. This reduces pain and discomfort and improves your moods and overall mental perspective.

Stress Management: Insufficient sleep, irregular diet patterns and poor lifestyle can cause severe physical and mental stress.

Practicing regular stress management techniques like meditation, yoga, aromatherapy and biofeedback can reduce stress extensively.

Reduction of stress helps you manage your PMS symptoms better.

Maintaining Menstrual Diary: Maintain a menstrual diary, recording all your symptoms, time of occurrence, severity and frequency of occurrence over a period of two to three months. This helps you prepare for a possible outbreak of symptoms in the future.

19. Twenty Tips for Reducing the Effects of Premenstrual Syndrome

Premenstrual syndrome symptoms do not occur due to any one specific reason or cause.

However, you can try the following tips to lower their intensity or frequency of occurrence of PMS symptoms:

Diet: Your food intake plays a major role in reducing PMS symptoms. Eat food rich in calcium and vitamin D like low-fat milk, cheese, yogurt, and spinach.

You can take calcium and vitamin B6 supplements.

A balanced diet spread over three big and three small meals a day can prove beneficial. Your diet should, ideally, consist of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, proteins and other complex carbohydrates.

Exercise: Regular physical exercise like walking, swimming, or jogging promote a feeling of well-being. Maintain a regular exercise schedule of half an hour about four times in a week. You can divide your exercise schedule to have ten minutes of exercise in the mornings and another twenty minutes in the evenings.

This can cause your brain to release natural feel-good chemicals, endorphins, which reduce pain. It also reduces fluid retention in the ankles and fights off feelings of depression and anxiety.

Food Cravings: PMS symptoms often cause cravings for salty or sugary foods. Refrain from eating such foods during PMS.

Satisfy your urge to eat sugary foods by eating healthy foods rich in complex carbohydrates like whole wheat breads, pasta, potatoes, cereal, pulses, and fruits. Eating well-balanced and regular meals

with sufficient amounts of proteins, carbohydrates, and fiber can reduce your cravings for junk.

Rest: Your body requires adequate rest in the form of sleep for eight to nine hours at night. PMS could prompt you to have many rest periods during the day. Try not to go against your body's demands and, instead, take intermediate periods of rest to maintain your calm and have sufficient physical energy to carry out your chores. Maintain a regular sleep schedule by going to bed at the same time and waking up at the same time.

Avoid caffeine or any intense activity before bedtime.

Avoid Caffeine: Caffeine - as present in coffee, tea, chocolate, and cola – can be very harmful for PMS symptoms. Caffeine increases your irritation and could enhance tension levels. Further, it reduces your sleep and raises your anxiety levels causing extreme nervousness. Avoiding caffeine during PMS periods can bring substantial relief.

Alcohol and Nicotine: Consumption of alcohol and nicotine can be extremely harmful during PMS. Alcohol drains your body of vitamin B and upsets the body's normal metabolism.

Further, it may harm your liver.

Nicotine is equally harmful.

All these increase your PMS symptoms.

Avoid salty foods: Eating excessively salty foods like potato wafers, crackers, pickles, olives, breakfast cereals, and sauces cause fluid retention in body.

This causes swelling of abdomen and ankles with tenderness in breasts, headaches, and body aches. These PMS symptoms are primarily due to excessive body fluids.

Lowering salt intake reduces retention of water in body cells and may relieve you of most aches.

Stress: Physical and mental stress are very harmful for PMS symptoms. Do not put excessive physical strain on your body. Allow your body sufficient rest to recoup and work. Similarly, mental stress accelerates PMS symptoms. Identify specific stressors and try to do away with them.

Use relaxation techniques and time management principles to allocate your time so that you are able to attend to all chores diligently without exerting your body and mind.

A relaxing bath or a walk can reduce stress levels.

Medications: Consult your doctor for specific medications to overcome pain and stress during PMS. Over-the-counter pain medications may give you relief but you should check with your doctor before starting to take any of them.

Birth control pills regulate hormone levels.

Diuretics reduce water retention.

Anti-inflammatory drugs, such as Ibuprofen, may be helpful for PMS-associated pain.

Antidepressants like Paxil, Prozac, and Zoloft may prove effective for depression and irritability associated with PMS.

Mood stabilizers like Depakote or Lithium may control severe mood swings.

Yoga: Yoga is an excellent relaxation technique. Yoga involves specific body postures that bring relief from pain. It further eases joint pains, pain in the abdomen and menstrual cramps, which are common PMS symptoms.

Many people find benefit from practicing yoga and meditation regularly for twenty to thirty minutes daily.

Be warned that yoga-related injuries, especially with people that have only recently started learning it, are quite high.

Self-Guidance: If you suffer from PMS symptoms regularly, you can detect changes in your mood and energy levels.

Planning your work schedule to suit these changes so that you feel less uncomfortable can be a smart way of tackling PMS symptoms.

Include your family members within your self-support system so that they remain aware of your PMS symptoms and your difficult days.

Social Support: PMS symptoms are common among most women. Forming social support groups to help each other during intense days can prove very helpful.

You can provide moral support to others in your group during their low days, and then count on you receiving help and support from them at your times of need.

Such bonding improves your stress levels and helps you cope with serious PMS symptoms.

Maintain a Menstrual Diary: Maintaining a menstrual diary and recording your low and very low days can help you remain prepared for severe mood swings, pain, and depression. Such a diary can provide useful information for identification of specific patterns for

your medical practitioner to suggest remedial steps for overcoming PMS symptoms.

It may also help your family members to adjust their schedules and give you extra time and attention during your difficult days.

Self-Care: Take hot water baths to get relief from pain as in PMS. Use lavender, menthol or other herbs in your bath water. They are claimed to have anti-inflammatory properties that reduce pain.

Use a supportive sports bra to manage your tender breasts during PMS.

Herbal remedies: Simple herbal remedies might work wonders for your PMS symptoms.

Chamomile tea is claimed to ease tension while ginger and lemon teas may prove very relaxing.

Valerian root is said to relieve abdominal pain while St. John's Wort is used by some who believe it regulates mood swings.

Massage: Body massage is an excellent way to reduce body aches and mental tension. Body massage with other therapies like aromatherapy, Tai Chi, or other relaxation techniques might reduce PMS symptoms substantially.

Laughter: Laughter increases serotonin levels in your brain. Serotonin is a feel-good chemical released by your brain. Tickle your laughter buds by watching a funny movie or going to a live comedy show. Such laughter sessions ease mental stress and enliven your mood, thereby releasing severe mental exertion and pressure due to PMS symptoms.

Acupressure: Learn simple acupressure techniques to find relief from most pains during PMS symptoms. Place your palm on the

inner part of your leg above your ankle and press it with your fingers for a few seconds and then release it. Repeat this process for five minutes to increase blood flow to uterus and thereby provide relief from pain and cramps. Other similar acupressure skills can help you attend to your problem points by yourself at your home.

Vitamin Supplements: Simple vitamin supplements like calcium and vitamin D may help to provide the necessary vitamin requirements for your body. Levels of these essential vitamins fluctuate drastically and may cause pain and mood swings. Supplements can help to regulate such fluctuating levels and provide necessary relief with some people.

Education and Information: Gather as much information about PMS as possible from your doctor, then (if you want to) supplement that from books and the Internet. Educate yourself on all possibilities associated with PMS symptoms so that you can judge your symptoms and take remedial measures to try to combat them.

There is no conclusive evidence or established fact that names a specific cause or causes for the occurrence of PMS symptoms. Although most research indicates that hormonal changes may be the main cause, yet, there is no answer to the fact that PMS affects only a percentage of women although hormonal changes occur in every woman. So, there are no specific remedies for curing PMS symptoms.

Instead, these tips help you overcome PMS symptoms or to keep them under control. Any of these tips could provide relief to some while some other tip could prove beneficial for others. Hence, you have to judge these tips on a trial and error basis and thereafter include it with your regular routine.

20. Physical Exercises to Relieve Premenstrual Syndrome

Many women, especially when they are between thirty to forty years of age, experience severe symptoms of premenstrual syndrome that leave them with a feeling of helplessness. This is the time when women have their hands full of growing children and an increasing workload at the office.

Physical exercises done regularly, a few times a week, can help overcome premenstrual syndrome.

Exercising to Reduce Effects of Premenstrual Syndrome

Studies reveal that women who exercise often lead healthier lives, do not put on as much fat and are relatively happy compared to those who exercise little or not at all.

A thirty-minute walk or climbing stairs to work may be a good start for you to do daily.

Busy working women can incorporate exercise in their workday by walking around the office or parking the car at a distance and then walking to the office. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator also helps to burn calories and will keep you positively charged.

Choose a form of exercise that you can do throughout the year. Start with a few minutes of physical activity at a time, and then slowly build it up to a continuous half an hour routine.

You can take dancing lessons, go swimming or do yoga regularly to stay fit and to help overcome the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome.

Benefits of Physical Exercise

Exercising releases endorphins, the feel-good chemicals in your body. Exercise also reduces fluid retention that is a common symptom of premenstrual syndrome.

Working out improves the blood and oxygen circulation to all parts of the body, including the pelvic region.

This encourages removal of toxic products from the body and promotes secretion of anti-inflammatory prostaglandins that play an important role in pain relief.

Stress Release through Yoga

Stress can also contribute to premenstrual syndrome. So, try to identify the trigger factors in your life and avoid them.

Meditate for a few minutes daily and enjoy this time to commune with yourself.

Yoga is promoted by some as possibly the best way to release stress, as it is not physically taxing and stimulates the hormonal and reproductive systems of the body. You can join yoga classes or do yoga with the help of instructional DVDs or tapes. It teaches you to concentrate on breathing and may help you to overcome muscular cramps. Be careful though, as many people injure themselves when starting to learn yoga.

Positive thinking techniques, massages and biofeedback are other ways to help to overcome stress and ease premenstrual syndrome.

21. Nutrition Tips for Premenstrual Syndrome

Nowadays, people eat lot of processed foods like bread, burgers and potato chips that are loaded with salt and low on nutritional value. Women who consume processed foods in large quantities, and those who lack certain vitamins and minerals in their diet, often experience acute symptoms of premenstrual syndrome.

They feel hungry all the time and crave for sweet and fried food. They are irritable and feel perpetually tired. By modifying your diet to include healthy foods, you can overcome the symptoms of premenstrual syndrome to some extent.

Modify Diet to Overcome Premenstrual Syndrome

- Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Consume wholegrain bread, nuts brown rice and unprocessed sugar.
- Cut out extra salt in the food; substitute herbs or lemon juice.
- Stop eating salty snacks and junk food a week before your periods, to minimize bloating.
- Avoid junk food, chocolates and honey.
- Consume lean meat, chicken and fish and avoid red meat.
- Stay away from fried foods and snacks.
- Use unsaturated oils like safflower oil for cooking.
- Give up the use of hydrogenated oils and butter for cooking.
- Eat dairy products made from low-fat milk like yogurt and low fat cheese.
- Drink a lot of water, fruit juices and herbal teas.

- Avoid caffeine and colas. Drink decaffeinated tea and coffee instead.
- Don't drink alcohol or alcoholic beverages.
- Order healthy dishes when eating out.
- Buy groceries after reading labels properly for salt content.
- Avoid sugary foods as they result in high blood sugar. This triggers insulin production that leads to a drop in sugar levels.
- It is advisable to eat small meals at intervals of two to three hours.

Dietary Supplements to Overcome Chronic Deficiencies

Females with chronic deficiencies of vitamin B6, vitamin E, magnesium or calcium may take the recommended doses of these minerals as per their requirements, subject to prior approval by their doctor.

This may restore the hormonal imbalance and help to minimize the discomfort of premenstrual syndrome.

Though these vitamins are available across the counter, you must consult a doctor before starting to use them. He will help to identify the exact nutritional deficiency and prescribe the correct dose as per your individual requirements.

Follow up with the doctor after some time to revise the dose or to change the medication, depending on the reduction in premenstrual discomfort.

Vitamin B6

You may be able to safely take 100mg of vitamin B6 daily. This vitamin plays an important role in functioning of the nervous

system. However, some women experience itching in the limbs, headaches and fatigue with prolonged use.

It may be best to consume Vitamin B in small doses and to stop taking it if there is no visible improvement.

Vitamin E

Taking vitamin E daily may help to overcome depression and stress in some women. A commonly recommended dose is 300-400 IU daily but consult your doctor for advice.

Calcium

Women who take a minimum of 1200 mg of calcium may experience relief from some painful premenstrual symptoms. You may be able to take this dose through food as well as supplements.

Evening Primrose Oil

Taking capsules of evening primrose oil is claimed to help overcome breast tenderness associated with premenstrual syndrome. It contains gamma linolenic acid that is said to promote the beneficial action of prostaglandins. Some women may experience nausea, headaches and digestive problems. This might be overcome by taking the capsule with or after meals. Women who have certain food allergies may develop a skin rash on taking this supplement. So, consult a doctor before taking this supplement.

Magnesium

Taking at least 50mg of magnesium along with vitamin B6 is claimed by some to help relieve stress. You can take this as a supplement or (possibly a better way) through foods like nuts, legumes, oysters, and dark green vegetables.

Following these nutrition tips may help you to overcome some of the pain associated with premenstrual syndrome.

22. Lifestyle Changes for PMS Sufferers

Women undergo hormonal and physiological changes that lead into symptoms associated with premenstrual syndrome.

Many become depressed, moody and feel tired and bloated. Some are irritable and cannot sleep at night. Other symptoms include breast tenderness and headaches.

You can overcome some of the discomfort of premenstrual syndrome by making simple lifestyle changes.

Exercise Daily

Work-out for at least thirty minutes daily. Undertake a non-strenuous form of exercise that you can do regularly. You can go for a brisk walk, swim or do yoga.

Yoga stimulates the hormonal and reproductive systems of the body and is claimed by many to reduce the discomfort of premenstrual syndrome.

If you are busy, walk to work or take the stairs instead of the elevator.

Stress can worsen premenstrual distress. So, identify the causes of stress and try to avoid them. Meditate for a few minutes and concentrate on your breathing to overcome stress.

Eat a Nutritious Diet

Don't consume processed food and eat a healthy amount of fresh fruits and vegetables. Avoid salty foods and snacks as their consumption leads to water retention.

Drink lots of water and avoid colas and caffeine.

Drinking excessive alcohol leads to headaches and fatigue. Drink herbal tea, decaffeinated coffee and fruit juices instead.

Avoiding caffeine may reduce breast tenderness and headaches may reduce in number and severity.

Do not eat fried food and opt for a healthier unsaturated cooking medium like sunflower oil.

Stay away from sugary snacks as the body digests them quickly, leading to a rise in blood sugar levels. This triggers an insulin response leading to low blood sugar and a desire to eat more of the sugary snack.

Snack on wholegrain bread, nuts and popcorn instead of fries and burgers. This will reduce bloating associated with premenstrual syndrome.

Steps to Overcome the Uneasiness of PMS

- Wear comfortable clothes that are not tight.
- Wear a supportive bra as the breasts enlarge prior to your periods.
- Massage the lower back and abdomen for relief from abdominal cramps.
- Take a hot water bath or place a hot water bottle on the stomach for greater relief from abdominal pain.

How Supplements may Help

- Calcium when 1200mg is taken daily, is claimed by some to help relieve pain, depression and food cravings. You can take this through your food or in the form of supplements.

- Magnesium is claimed to help relieve stress if taken with Vitamin B6. You can consume this as a supplement or through natural foods like nuts and legumes.
- Some people believe that taking about 10 mg of Vitamin B6 may help the proper functioning of the nervous system.
- Vitamin E is claimed by some people to help some women overcome depression and anxiety associated with premenstrual syndrome.

Medication for Severe Cases

Those who experience severe pain can consult a doctor for painkillers.

The doctor may prescribe diuretics for those with excessive water retention.

Women who suffer severe depression can consult a doctor for a prescription of antidepressants. Talk to the doctor about the side effects of these drugs and consult him for the appropriate dosage that will not cause an addiction to them.

A few women may require a treatment of a gonadotropin-releasing hormone that curbs estrogen production.

You can try herbal remedies (be careful of possible side effects) to relieve pain.

Some women have a severe case of premenstrual syndrome called **premenstrual dysphoric order**. They need counseling as these extreme mood swings can greatly affect their personal relationships.

Making these lifestyle changes can help you to lead a less stressful and healthier life.

Part-VI : Alternative and Complementary Therapies

23. How to Treat Premenstrual Syndrome Symptoms Naturally

Many women go through a painful time before their periods every month. They experience water retention, mood swings, headaches and disturbed sleep. Some anti-inflammatory drugs may help to reduce these symptoms, but some can cause harmful side effects in some patients.

Prolonged use of these drugs may result in blood clots, increased risk of heart attack, breast cancer and uterine cancer.

Advantages of Using Natural Treatments for Premenstrual Syndrome

In view of the above facts, some women opt to use herbal and natural remedies that their promoters sometimes claim to have little or no side effects for treating premenstrual syndrome.

Herbal supplements are claimed to be more effective and cost less, compared to prescription drugs. However, it is always best to consult a doctor before starting herbal supplements to avoid complications arising.

Ensure that you consult a qualified practitioner with enough knowledge of herbal treatments. Subject to your doctor's approval, use only the best quality supplements for best results.

Natural Methods to Deal with Premenstrual Syndrome

Diet Modification

Eating healthy and fresh foods can help alleviate bloating. Avoid eating processed foods and excessive salt. This includes foods like burgers, fries, olives, cereal, crackers and most snacks available in

the market. Reduce the intake of caffeine and alcohol. Drink herbal teas and fruit juices instead. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables and give up red meat. Modify your diet to include wholegrain, whole-wheat products, unsalted nuts and seeds.

Regular Exercise

Exercise regularly for at least half an hour daily. This can include a brisk walk, yoga, dancing, tai chi or swimming. Exercising improves blood circulation and releases endorphins that are the feel good hormones of the body. Exercising helps relieve stress that is a trigger factor for many symptoms of premenstrual syndrome.

Massage

Try massaging the abdomen and lower back for relief from abdominal pain. Massaging regularly with aromatherapy oils helps in alleviating the pain associated with premenstrual syndrome.

Warm Bath

You can treat the area with a hot water bottle or a take a warm bath with essential oils like chamomile to try to get relief from cramps and pain. Rosemary oil may help to ease bloating while rose oil is claimed to relieve anxiety and overcomes depression.

These oils mainly help to ease emotional stress and relax the muscles, giving some reprieve from discomfort. Adding menthol oil, a natural anti-inflammatory to the bath water may help to alleviate pain.

Acupuncture

Some women visit a trained acupuncturist before the onset of their periods for respite from pain. This therapy is claimed to be especially beneficial for women with hormonal problems.

Natural Supplements to Reduce Discomfort

Intake of Multivitamins

Sometimes a deficiency of essential vitamins and minerals in the diet may lead to painful periods.

Consult a doctor for proper doses of vitamin B6, vitamin E and magnesium supplements and to ensure that you actually need them. Vitamin B6 is supposed to help overcome depression, while magnesium is claimed to relax painful muscles, easing the distress of muscular cramps.

If there is no change in the symptoms, discontinue the use of the supplements.

Natural Herbs for Easing Discomfort

Black cohosh taken in doses of 20mg twice daily is supposed to give respite from mood swings, hot flashes and night sweats. This herb is said to work by having a positive impact on the serotonin pathway but is claimed to not affect the estrogen levels in the body.

Evening primrose oil is claimed to reduce breast tenderness, food cravings and cramps. It contains gamma linoleic acid that some believe reduces the impact of prostaglandins and reduces inflammation. They suggest that you might take it in the form of capsules three times a day. The maximum permissible dose is 3g per day.

St. John's Wort is claimed to help increase the levels of serotonin in the body. Avoid taking this herb if you are taking any antidepressant drug.

Ginkgo Biloba may decrease breast pain.

Chaste berry taken in doses of 20 mg per day is supposed to help improve most of the painful premenstrual symptoms. Avoid this herb if you are taking birth control pills.

Valerian root is claimed to help overcome abdominal pain. However, only ever take this supplement for a short time.

Chamomile tea is claimed to relax the mind and is supposed to be a good way to ease tension.

Taking natural products and following a healthy lifestyle may help some women cope with painful premenstrual syndrome.

24. Complementary or Alternative Therapies

Several complementary and alternative therapies are claimed to be safe to use for relief from premenstrual syndrome. They are also claimed to have little or no side effects and to greatly improve your quality of life.

Ensure that you use the purest and best quality supplements after consulting your doctor and a trained therapist.

Always inform your doctor when you intend to start using these therapies. This helps overcome conflicting interactions between the two systems of medicine.

Complementary Therapies

Relaxation techniques like yoga, massage and breathing techniques may reduce mental stress and relax the body bringing relief from discomfort.

Sleep deprivation therapy works on the principle of reducing the amount of sleep to overcome depression. This therapy works on an adjustment of circadian rhythms that acts as a mood up-lifter after a single night of recovery sleep.

Exposure to bright lights in the morning and evening when having premenstrual symptoms may bring relief by reducing their intensity.

Intake of Supplements

To overcome the chronic deficiency of certain vitamins and minerals you may take supplements after consultation with your doctor.

Vitamin B6 may help to improve functioning of the endocrine system and overcome depression. Restrict its use to below 100mg daily.

Calcium taken a maximum of 1200mg daily is claimed to help to overcome cramps and reduces bloating. It is also said to bring pain relief and reduce mood swings.

Magnesium taken daily may reduce the effect of prostaglandins that cause swelling of the body. Some suggest that sufferers take it with vitamin B6 for best results.

Vitamin E may help to decrease breast tenderness and brings relief from headaches, food cravings and disturbed sleep.

Zinc may reduce occurrence of pimples resulting from premenstrual syndrome.

Progesterone cream applied locally is claimed to reduce many symptoms of PMS, but may interfere with contraception.

Omega 3 fatty acids, taken in the form of fish oil capsules, are supposed to help to reduce swelling.

Herbal Supplements

- Try the herbal supplements as per the directions given with them after consultation with your doctor, for a few months. Stop taking them if you notice no improvement in the symptoms.
- Adding menthol, a natural anti-inflammatory to the bath water may help reduce the pain associated with premenstrual syndrome.
- Dandelion leaf extracts reduces fluid accumulation in the body.

Alternative Therapies

Acupuncture

Acupuncture, based on the ancient Chinese system of medicine, uses needles at specific pressure points on the body. Chinese medicine works on the principle of energy flows in the body to heal disease.

The theory is that blockages to the flow of energy may result in a disturbance in the energy equilibrium of the body. Acupuncture is claimed to help remove the negative energy from painful sites using needles, resulting in pain relief.

Get acupuncture therapy only from a trained practitioner every month for best results.

This system of medicine takes a holistic view of the treatment and is different for each individual. It may involve some changes in diet and intake of herbal supplements to restore the energy balance of the body.

Massage

You may get regular massages using aromatherapy oils to try to ease painful muscles. You can use essential oils derived from the bark, root or leaves of specific plants for the massage. Alternately, you can add them to your bath water or vaporize them in a burner.

Yoga

Yoga involves deep breathing exercises that stimulate blood circulation and the hormonal system of the body. It is a non-strenuous form of exercise that is claimed to relieve tension from the mind and eases many aches and pains of premenstrual syndrome.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy medicines for premenstrual syndrome are available across the counter. However, it is best to consult your doctor and a homeopath that will give the correct medicine based on his assessment of your symptoms.

Homeopathic medicine is claimed to be safe to use with no side effects and to be made from naturally occurring plant and animal extracts.

Here is a list of some homeopathic medicines that are claimed to be useful in treating premenstrual syndrome:

- **Colocynthis** is claimed to be helpful for reducing abdominal cramps, especially in women who are agitated.
- **Cimicifuga** is claimed to be ideal for severe pain, including a sciatica type of pain. It is claimed to be helpful for alleviating frustration and helplessness in some women.
- **Chamomilla** is claimed to treat mood swings and severe pain.
- **Ignatia** is claimed to calm very emotional women who are prone to panic attacks.
- **Magnesia phos** is claimed to reduce abdominal cramps.
- **Pulsatilla** is claimed to be suitable for emotional women and those who have irregular periods. It is also claimed to be helpful for those affected by nausea and heat.
- **Sepia** is claimed to overcome indigestion, irritation and fluid retention.

- **Lachesis** is claimed to be suitable for women who have pain on the left side. It is also claimed to be effective in women who are sensitive to light.
- **Lycopodium** is claimed to relieve flatulence and water retention that are particularly bad in hot weather.
- **Nux vomica** is claimed to be useful for women who experience vomiting.

Naturopathy

Naturopathy uses natural products and diet modification to cleanse the body of toxic material that causes illness.

Herbal Therapy

Herbal therapy is available in the form of tincture, tea and capsules. After consulting your doctor, get the proper dosage from the herbalist for best results.

The herbs are said to only be effective when used along with a proper diet and exercise regimen.

All the above complementary and herbal therapies work only when you eat healthy and nutritious food and incorporate exercise in your daily regimen.

Part-VII : Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) FAQ

25. Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) - Frequently Asked Questions

What is Premenstrual Syndrome?

The ovulation period in a woman often causes specific physiological, emotional and mood disturbances. These disturbances come under the purview of premenstrual syndrome or PMS. These usually stop soon after menstrual flow starts.

When did the Medical Fraternity Recognize PMS?

PMS symptoms have been around since the time of ancient Greeks. However, the medical fraternity officially recognized this disorder around 1931, although the term premenstrual syndrome came about only in 1953.

Does Every Woman Experience PMS?

No, not every woman experiences PMS. More than 80% of women experience some PMS symptoms. Around 10% experience severe PMS symptoms that may debilitate them completely.

What Causes PMS?

There is no single, specific cause that the occurrence of PMS is attributable to. Various theories exist, although none have any conclusive proof. However, a common factor that is likely to have some part in causing PMS centers on the hormonal changes occurring in a woman's body in the days preceding her menstrual cycle. These hormonal changes trigger various associated reactions in body functions, some or all of which may contribute to PMS.

What are the Common Symptoms of Premenstrual Syndrome?

Common physical symptoms of premenstrual syndrome include:

- appetite changes with food cravings,
- fatigue,
- sleep disturbances,
- breast tenderness,
- bloating and
- acne.

Common emotional symptoms of premenstrual syndrome include:

- depression,
- irritability,
- mood swings - alternating sadness and anger,
- crying and
- oversensitivity.

How can PMS be diagnosed?

The best way to diagnose PMS is through a menstrual diary that lists all physical and emotional symptoms over three successive months. If changes occur persistently only during the ovulation period, it indicates PMS.

The ovulation period starts around ten days from start of menstruation.

There are currently no laboratory tests to detect the presence of PMS.

Are PMS symptoms common to other ailments?

Yes, there are a few nervous and physiological disorders that have similar symptoms to those of PMS. Such common symptoms include fatigue, depression, irritable bowel syndrome and water retention.

Can PMS Symptoms be Distinguished from Symptoms of Other Ailments?

The main demarcation that distinguishes PMS symptoms from those of other ailments is the symptom-free interval after the start of menstrual flow and the beginning of next ovulation.

Existence of this symptom-free period tends to confirm PMS diagnosis.

If there is no symptom-free interval, then it could indicate some other disorder or ailment.

What Treatment Options are Available for PMS?

There is no single treatment option or specific cure for PMS. You can make specific dietary and lifestyle changes to lower the intensity of PMS symptoms.

You may find further relief in some medications like pain-killers, diuretics, and antidepressants subject to prior consultation with your medical practitioner.

What dietary changes might provide relief from PMS?

Dietary changes, including;

- ✓ increasing intake of calcium-rich foods,
- ✓ avoiding sugary and salty foods,
- ✓ eating more fresh vegetables, fruits, and high-fiber foods,
- ✓ quitting smoking and consumption of alcohol, and

- ✓ restricting intake of caffeine and animal fats.

... could be beneficial.

What Lifestyle Changes Might Provide Relief from PMS?

Specific changes in lifestyle such as;

- ✓ having a regular exercise schedule,
- ✓ maintaining regular sleep patterns,
- ✓ practicing relaxation techniques like yoga and mediation and
- ✓ trying to maintain your calm in all types of situations

may prove beneficial and provide some relief from the effects of PMS.

How Does Exercise Help PMS Symptoms?

Physical exercises like walking, swimming, jogging, and other aerobics can help to relieve PMS symptoms.

Physical exercises improve general body health and reduce nervous tension and anxiety. Exercise also prompts the brain to release specific chemicals like endorphins and serotonin. These enhance moods and feelings and improve mental capabilities and may give some relief from pain.

Can Your Family Help in Reducing PMS Effects?

Your family can be a major source of support in reducing the effects of PMS symptoms.

Maintaining a regular menstrual diary can forewarn you and your family members of specific low days. Other family members can then be ready to help you overcome mood changes or your depressing thoughts.

Family members can also help you with your chores and ensure that you get time for more rest and relaxation when you have PMS.

Is There a Cure for PMS?

No, there is no cure for PMS. The best current option is to have the best possible management of your present symptoms through specific changes in diet and lifestyle.

Although there are various medications available for relief from pain, it is better to use self-control as much as possible.

Having a balanced diet with sufficient nutrition and adhering to regular exercise and relaxation techniques can help to keep most PMS symptoms at bay.

Part-VIII: Glossary of Terms

26. Premenstrual Syndrome Glossary of Terms

Aerobic Exercise

Active exercises that increase blood circulation in your body by requiring combined working of your heart and lungs to supply more oxygen to your body.

Antidepressant

Any drug that helps to treat or prevent depression

Anxiety

A feeling of apprehension with characteristic symptoms of sweating, palpitations and fear.

Birth Control

Specific medications, methods, or practices that restrict the occurrence of pregnancy in a woman

Caffeine

Stimulant found in coffee beans, colas, tea leaves and cocoa beans

Calcium

Essential mineral for making bones strong. It is also necessary for proper functioning of your nervous system, muscle contraction, blood clotting and heart functions.

Common calcium sources include leafy green vegetables, dairy foods, tofu, broccoli, canned salmon and oysters.

Carbohydrates

One of the three major nutrient types essential for supplying energy to your body. It is mainly present in starches and sugars. Chemical composition is a compound of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen.

Cardiovascular

Circulatory system consisting of heart and blood vessels supplying essential nutrients and oxygen to body parts and removing carbon dioxide and other wastes.

Depression

Illness that seriously affects the moods and thoughts of a person and impacts on normal functions like eating and sleeping.

Diagnosis

Identification of a disease or illness through evaluating symptoms and other factors.

Diuretic

Anything that promotes urine formation and removal by your kidneys

Fatigue

Weariness that causes lower capacity to work with a strong feeling of tiredness

Genetic

Relating to your genes.

Hormone

Chemical substance produced in your body to control and regulate the activity of specific cells

Ibuprofen

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug that helps to control pain and swelling

Insomnia

Inadequate or poor quality sleep which includes symptoms like frequent awakening, disturbed sleep and un-refreshing sleep. Insomnia could cause tiredness, irritability, insufficient concentration, an overall lack of energy and affect your social and business performance.

Joint

The point where two bones join with fibrous and connective tissue for smooth movement of body parts

Magnesium

Essential mineral that helps nerve signaling, maintaining healthy bones and normal muscle contraction

Menstrual

Pertaining to the menses or the monthly period cycle in women

Menstrual Cramps

Cramps or pain in the lower abdomen that characteristically occur during menstrual periods due to uterus contractions

Menstrual Cycle

Monthly cycle of changes that starts with the formation and release of an egg from your ovaries for fertilization. If there is no fertilization, the uterus lining and egg is shed in the form of menses or monthly periods

Naproxen

A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug that helps to control fever, pain, and inflammation

Nerve

Fibrous tissue that transmits motor and sensory information from one body part to another

Onset

Start of any specific symptom or illness

Oral Contraceptive

Birth control pill taken orally (through the mouth). Taking the prescribed dosage during specific periods of the menstrual cycle has a high success rate of preventing pregnancy

Ovarian

Concerned with the ovaries where your eggs are produced

Ovulation

The release of an egg ready for fertilization from your ovaries. Normally, this period starts from the fourteenth day of the menstrual cycle and extends until the twenty-eighth day

Pain

Uncomfortable sensation causing mild to agonizing discomfort and due to nerve stimulation

Pelvic

Anything to do with your body near the lower part of your abdomen

Premenstrual

Just before start of menstruation

Premenstrual Syndrome

Combination of various physical and emotional disturbances occurring during the fortnight preceding the start of your menstrual

cycle. It normally subsides with start of menstrual flow but not for all women.

Serotonin

Specific hormone or chemical released by the brain that acts as a messenger to other body parts

Side Effects

Problems occurring beyond the desired effect of treatment but linked to the treatment.

Sleep

Your body's rest cycle

Syndrome

Set of signs and symptoms that occur together

Zinc

A mineral that is essential for your body's health; it helps in the making of proteins.

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