

## **PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME (PMS)**

PMS refers to the worsening of any number of symptoms in the one to two weeks before menstruation. Typical symptoms include: decreased energy level, irritability, depression, food cravings, headache, breast pain, backache, abdominal bloating, joint pain and swelling of the fingers and ankles.

The naturopathic approach to treating PMS is holistic, looking at the many aspects of well-being that affect the menstrual cycle.

### **Foods that worsen PMS:**

1. Sugar and refined carbohydrates
2. Salt and foods high in sodium
3. Caffeine
4. Alcohol

### **Dietary Changes for PMS:**

1. Reduce your caffeine intake (coffee, cola, black tea, chocolate)
2. Reduce your intake of sugar and simple carbohydrates (bread, pasta, white rice, muffins, cookies, etc)
3. Increase intake of complex carbohydrates that are high in fibre (vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lentils and beans)
4. Replace some of the meat you eat with more fish, legumes and healthy soy products (organic tofu or tempeh)
5. Reduce alcohol intake
6. Increase intake of healthy fats (fish oil, olive oil, ground flaxseeds)
7. Avoid salty or highly processed foods (pre-packaged or ready-made foods)

### **How can Exercise Help?**

Frequent aerobic exercise is essential in regulating hormones, mood and treating PMS. Exercise increases dopamine and endorphins, which help us feel happy and positive. You need a minimum of 2½ hours of moderate to vigorous exercise each week. Frequency is more important than intensity; therefore you don't need to train for a marathon, you just have to move your body on a regular basis. Exercising on a daily basis is most helpful for women with severe PMS symptoms.

### **What role does stress play?**

Research shows that women who feel stressed and dissatisfied with life have more severe PMS symptoms. High stress levels disrupt the female hormones that control the menstrual cycle and also predispose women to feelings of anxiety and depression. Relaxation vastly improves PMS symptoms. Make a concerted effort to prioritize things that you find relaxing, such as: yoga, walking, massage, meditation, prayer, being creative (such as art, music, etc) or just simple quiet time.

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