

# Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)

## What is premenstrual syndrome (PMS)?

PMS is a group of physical symptoms and mood changes that are related to a woman's period (menstrual cycle).

PMS symptoms can happen 1 to 2 weeks before a woman's period and usually go away when her period starts.

PMS symptoms can:

- be mild or very bad
- last from a few days to 2 weeks
- happen during some months, but not others
- affect any woman who has a period

There can be many symptoms with PMS. The most common symptoms are:

- feeling tense and anxious
- being irritable
- forgetting things
- headache
- food cravings
- bloating in the abdomen
- joint or muscle pain
- acne
- constipation
- feeling sad or hopeless
- mood swings or crying spells
- breast swelling or tenderness
- having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- a dull ache in the low abdomen or back

## What causes PMS?

The cause of PMS is not known, but changing hormone levels during a menstrual cycle may be involved.

## How is PMS diagnosed?

There is no test to diagnose PMS.

To find out if you have PMS, keep a daily record of when you have symptoms and what they are for 2 months in a row. This will help your healthcare provider decide if you have PMS.

Some women may have a very bad form of PMS called Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD). It can severely affect daily activities like going to work or school. PMDD can also cause conflict with family, friends, and co-workers. You can also feel overwhelmed or out of control during this time. If you think you have PMDD, see your healthcare provider because you may need special medicine or treatments.

## What can I do to help with PMS symptoms?

If you have PMS, try these self treatments:

- deep breathing and relaxation exercises
- stay away from caffeine, salty food, and alcohol
- quit smoking
- get enough sleep
- exercise for 30 to 60 minutes a day
- eat a balanced diet according to Canada's Food Guide
- ask a pharmacist about over-the-counter medicines (e.g., ibuprofen)

If these treatments don't help, see your healthcare provider. There are prescription medicines (e.g., birth control pills, pain medicine) that can help decrease PMS symptoms. You need to see your healthcare provider to make sure you don't have another health problem that's causing your symptoms.

## Did You Know

- You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
- Plan ahead and decide to protect yourself to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- It's important to talk to your partner about how you can protect each other.
- Use a condom every time you have sex (vaginal, oral, anal) to lower the risk of STIs and HIV.

## Websites

[www.myhealth.alberta.ca](http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)

[www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

[www.teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)

[www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) and search for Sexual and Reproductive Health

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area, 780-408-5465 in the Edmonton area, or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

---

*This material is for information purposes only. It should not be used in place of medical advice, instruction and/or treatment. If you have questions, speak with your doctor or appropriate healthcare provider.*