

Premenstrual Syndrome

PMS or PMT

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) covers a wide variety of symptoms that occur regularly between the time of ovulation and the start of menstruation (period) for 1.5 million women in the UK. PMS probably a better name than PMT (premenstrual tension) as the symptoms commonly experienced cover a wide range of physical, psychological and behavioural symptoms.

The thing that defines PMS is not the symptoms themselves but the fact that they occur before the start of a period and have usually resolved completely by the third day of bleeding.

The diagnosis of PMS is best confirmed by the use of a symptom diary (included with this leaflet). It should be clear from a completed diary as to whether the symptoms occur in cycles and resolve by the end of a period.

PMS does not happen before puberty, after the menopause or during pregnancy. It is related to the hormonal activity of the ovaries but studies have not shown any specific hormone deficiency or imbalance. It appears that symptoms that commonly appear during PMS can be made worse by progesterone and better with increased oestrogen.

Women who work at self-help measures such as working with their diet and exercise can get significant relief from their symptoms. There is no one specific "cure" for PMS.

The herb *Vitex agnus castus*, which is rich in plant oestrogen, has been shown to be beneficial. Nutritional supplements; calcium 1000mg, magnesium 400mg, manganese 6mg and vitamin E 400iu, as well as vitamin B6 have also been found to help.

If low mood, weepiness or depression are the main symptoms, St John's Wort may be helpful, but caution needs to be taken if you have high blood pressure and it should not be taken at the same time as prescription antidepressants.

Cyclical breast pain has been shown to helped by evening primrose oil.

If your symptoms are severe or your efforts at self-help have not improved your symptoms significantly you should make an appointment to discuss this with your GP. Hormone treatments to suppress normal function of your ovaries, like in the use of the contraceptive pill may be considered in younger women or HRT may be used in older women to supplement falling oestrogen levels. If the main symptoms are low mood or depression your GP may prescribe an SSRI antidepressant such as fluoxetine.