

Do You Suffer From **PMS?** Learn How to Solve the PMS Problem

From puberty through menopause, women experience a monthly cycle that involves fluctuating hormones, times of fertility, and periods of menstrual flow. For some women these natural cycles go rather smoothly, but for about 75% of Western women there is some level of discomfort during their monthly cycle. These health disturbances, which include both physical and emotional symptoms, typically start about 7-10 days before the start of menstruation.

Although the symptoms vary from woman to woman, they typically include cramps, headaches, backache, bloating, edema, food cravings, irritability, moodiness, and/or depression. There may also be problems with constipation or diarrhea, reduced tolerance for light and noise, sleep disturbances, fatigue, anxiety, difficulty with concentration, and loss of interest in sex.

These symptoms have been lumped together under the term, premenstrual syndrome or PMS for short. About 5% of women experience symptoms so severe that they interfere with their ability to function normally. Medicine has coined a new term for these women, premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). Whatever you label the problem, however, modern medicine only offers symptomatic relieve for PMS or PMDD symptoms.

This does not mean that there are no solutions. There are. In many cultures, the majority of women do not experience PMS. This suggests that dietary and lifestyle factors common to most Western woman are causing this discomfort during the monthly cycle.

So, in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*, we'll explore the underlying causes of PMS and PMDD, and the dietary and lifestyle changes that can help to eliminate these problems. This includes nutritional supplements and herbs that can help to balance a woman's cycle to both prevent and relieve common PMS and PMDD symptoms.

General Remedies for a Healthy Cycle

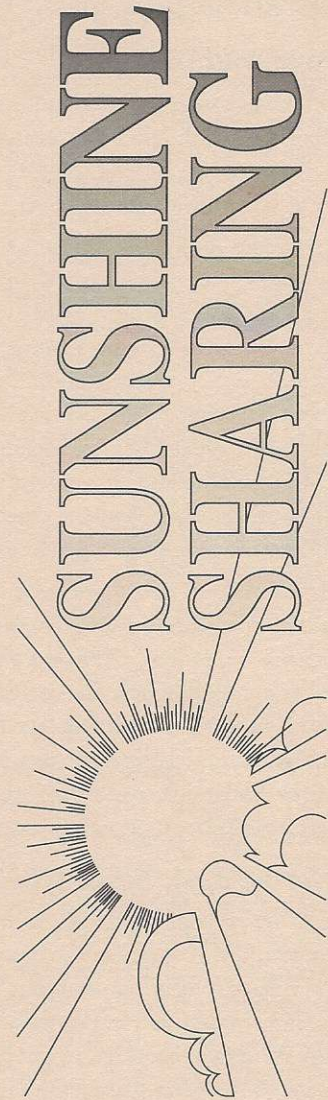
PMS symptoms do not have a singular cause, so there is no singular solution for every woman. There are some general aids, however, that will help most women. So, try the following things first. Then move on to the more specific remedies based on the general pattern of symptoms you experience. These more specific approaches are covered later on.

Support Your Liver

PMS may involve an overburdened and toxic liver. The liver helps regulate hormone balance by breaking down excess hormones when they are no longer needed. The liver is also involved in replacing the blood lost through the period. Traditional aids for preventing PMS problems in other cultures have typically involved herbs that support liver function (alteratives or blood purifiers) and herbs that help build healthy blood (blood tonics).

A classic Chinese formula for this purpose is dong quai root, prepared rehmannia root, white peony root and ligusticum rhizome. There are many variations of this basic formula, but millions of Chinese women take these formulas throughout their childbearing years. As a result, most women in China do not experience PMS or PMDD.

Western herbalists have also used female tonic formulas for the same purpose. These formulas are used to balance the cycle, support general health in women, and reduce or eliminate PMS symptoms. Typical ingredients in Western formulas include red raspberry, blessed thistle, black cohosh, and chaste tree berries. A list of some of these Chinese and Western female tonic formulas can be found at the bottom of page 3.



Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Important Notice

The information in *Sunshine Sharing* is for educational purposes only and should not be used to diagnose and treat diseases. If you have a health problem, we recommend you consult a competent health practitioner before embarking on any course of treatment.

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Improve Your Diet

A poor diet congests the liver and creates toxicity that contributes to PMS. So, as with any other health problem, eating a healthier diet is important to solving the problem of PMS. Here are a few specific suggestions to consider.

First, avoid foods that contain xenoestrogens. Xenoestrogens are environmental chemicals that mimic the action of estrogen. They are a major problem in PMS Type A, which is the most common type, but they may be a factor in all PMS types. Sources of xenoestrogens include many pesticides and agricultural chemicals; hormones fed to animals that make their way into commercial eggs, dairy, and meat; chemicals from plastic containers (especially soft plastics); and some cosmetic products. Eating organic foods and avoiding plastic containers, especially with hot food, is a good place to start in avoiding these chemicals.

You can help to decongest your liver by avoiding refined and processed foods to reduce the chemical burden on your liver. In particular, avoid refined sugar, margarine, shortening, and hydrogenated vegetable oils. You can also eat foods that aid liver function such as berries and leafy green vegetables. Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and cabbage are also helpful because they contain substances, like indole-3-carbinol, that aid the liver detoxification of excess hormones, including xenoestrogens.

Take Some Basic Supplements

There are several specific nutritional substances that aid most women with PMS. The first is magnesium, which is important for relaxing muscle tension and aiding the liver's ability to detoxify. One reason women may crave chocolate during their cycle is that it is high in magnesium. So, if you have a tendency to cramping, crave chocolate, suffer from irritability, anxiety, or insomnia during your cycle, and/or little things get on your nerves at that time of the month, try taking magnesium. For most women, 400-800 mg a day is sufficient.

A second nutrient many women with PMS need is vitamin B6. Although severe deficiency of B6 is rare, women with PMS may require extra B6 because it is important in hormonal and neurotransmitter regulation. Specifically, it is responsible for producing many of the amine-based neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, that the body uses to control mood and energy production. It is best to take B6 along with the rest of the B vitamins as part of a B-complex supplement.

Finally, oils which contain the fatty acid GLA have been helpful for many women with PMS. Oils high in GLA include evening primrose oil, borage oil, and black currant oil.

Specific Therapies for PMS

In addition to the general aids for PMS, one can also utilize specific herbs, supplements and therapies depending on the type of symptoms a woman experiences. The two main types of PMS are Type A and Type D, which have to do with the balance of estrogen and progesterone. These may be accompanied by additional symptoms that involve other hormonal imbalances. Below

you will find a description of all of these types of PMS and some proven remedies for each one.

Remember that it's possible to experience more than one of the subtypes of PMS, but with PMS Type A and Type D it will only be one or the other. For PMDD look for the same patterns as the same causes are at work, but the solutions may take longer.

PMS Type A

A stands for *anxiety* and *anger*, which are two of the common emotional states associated with this type of PMS. Other major symptoms include irritability, mood swings, and tension. Excess estrogen also tends to cause heavier bleeding during periods.



PMS Type A is characterized by high levels of estrogen and low levels of progesterone. It is the most common type of PMS, affecting about 80% of PMS sufferers. It has also been called estrogen dominance.

Too much estrogen increases adrenaline, noradrenaline, and serotonin levels, while dopamine and phenylalanine levels drop. This is what increases the level of irritability and anxiety. Excess estrogen also seems to block vitamin B6, causing an increased need for this nutrient. Magnesium is also helpful because it has a calming effect on the nerves.

The main goal of therapy in PMS Type A is to decrease estrogen levels and increase progesterone levels. Start by minimizing exposure to xenoestrogens as described above. Then, take supplements to aid the liver's ability to detoxify excess estrogens. The **Chinese Wood-Reducing Formula** (See *Female Tonic Formulas*, page 3) is a good formula as it helps calm irritability and anxiety while decongesting the liver.

Indole-3 carbinol is a compound found in cruciferous vegetables like cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Available both as a supplement and by eating more of these cruciferous vegetables, Indole-3 carbinol activates metabolic pathways in the liver that break down excess estrogens. This makes it valuable both for PMS Type A and for preventing estrogen dependent cancers.

The second goal in PMS Type A should be to increase levels of progesterone, as estrogen and progesterone compete for receptor sites. Herbs that may be helpful for this include false unicorn, chaste tree, and wild yam. Try using a **Female Tonic Formula** containing these herbs. It may also help to use a progesterone cream during the ten days prior to the period.



PMS Type D

D stands for *depression*. This type of PMS is associated with sadness, anxiety, confusion, emotional sensitivity (crying easily), and occasional rage—coupled with forgetfulness and possibly being accident-prone. Women with this type of PMS may even feel suicidal. While feelings of anxiety and anger, common in PMS Type A, may

be present in this type, depression and sadness are more dominant.

PMS D is caused by the opposite imbalance as PMS Type A. In this case there is too much progesterone and not enough estrogen. In balance, progesterone has a calming effect. When too much progesterone is produced, it depresses brain function.

Black cohosh is an antidepressant that has an estrogen-enhancing effect which makes it a good remedy for this type of depression. It can be taken as a single herb or as an ingredient in a *Female Tonic Formula* listed below. The *Chinese Wood-Increasing Formula* may be helpful for this type of PMS, but also consider the *Chinese Qi-Lifting Formula*. It contains some of the herbs used in TCM for women's problems, such as bupleurum, ligusticum, and dong quai, along with herbs that lift the mood and reduce feelings of anxiety.

An interesting feature of this type of PMS is the high levels of lead found in hair samples. High levels of lead are known to be the cause of certain types of chronic depression. When a deficiency of magnesium occurs, the body seems to be more susceptible to taking in lead, so extra magnesium is also important for women with this type of PMS.

PMS Type C

C stands for *cravings*. This type of PMS is associated with cravings for sugar and chocolate, a sign of hypoglycemia or low blood sugar. In PMS C it appears that prostaglandin 1 is deficient and insulin levels are too high. Blood sugar levels tend to drop significantly between ovulation and the onset of menses, which may cause fatigue and sugar cravings.



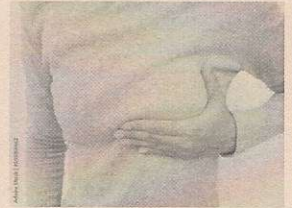
Therapy for PMS Type C includes avoiding refined carbohydrates in favor of protein and more complex carbohydrates like

fruits and vegetables. GLA is helpful for this type of PMS as it helps to increase prostaglandin 1, so evening primrose oil or a GLA supplement can be helpful. Other supplements that help with PMS Type C include magnesium, B6, zinc, and chromium. Low levels of magnesium also increase insulin production aggravating the low blood sugar levels. Chromium will help balance blood sugar and insulin levels and may also help to balance mood.

Another tip is to take 2 capsules of licorice root and 2 capsules of spirulina or an *Algae Formula* (containing spirulina, blue-green algae, and chlorella) with breakfast and lunch, and again in the mid-afternoon to stabilize blood sugar levels and reduce cravings.

PMS Type H

H is for *hyperhydration* or bloating, that uncomfortable feeling from excess water retention. This often happens during PMS due to excessive aldosterone, a hormone made by the adrenal glands. It is often associated with high levels of estrogen and/or low levels of magnesium. Breast swelling and tenderness are also associated with PMS Type H. PMS Type H may be associated with any of the previously mentioned PMS types.



If there are problems with water retention, it can help to take herbs to improve lymphatic drainage and kidney function. Using a *Liquid Kidney Formula* and a *Liquid Lymph Formula* together is helpful. The Liquid Kidney Formula contains juniper berry, goldenrod, asparagus, and plantain, while the ingredients in the Lymph Formula are cleavers, red clover, stillingia, and prickly ash. Combined, these herbs will reduce swelling, improve circulation, aid kidney function, and even help relieve tenderness and

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Female Tonic Formulas for PMS

Here are some herbal formulas traditionally used to reduce or eliminate PMS symptoms, with a brief description of the major benefits of each. Pick the formula that best matches your symptoms and see if it helps relieve your PMS problems.

Chinese Wood-Increasing Formula

The traditional Chinese name for this formula is Bu Xue, which means build the blood. This is a tonic for women who tend to be pale, anemic, and tired due to heavy menstrual bleeding. It contains peony, dong quai, rehmannia, and ligusticum, along with ganoderma, which calms the nerves, and lycium and bupleurum, which aid the liver. This formula will help to build the blood, regulate heavy bleeding, lift energy levels, and balance blood sugar.

Chinese Wood-Decreasing Formula

This formula combines peony and dong quai with bupleurum, cinnamon, and scute root. Its traditional Chinese name, Tiao He, means "mediate harmony." It works well when there are a lot of vague health problems that are hard to sort out and determine the cause. It is best suited for women who experience increased anger, irritability, and anxiety with their period (PMS type A). Other indications for this formula include a general feeling of

malaise (illness of unclear origin), a sensation of stuffiness or dull pain under the right rib cage, and digestive upset.

Stan Malstrom's Female Balancing Formula

This classic Western formula for PMS combines blessed thistle, red raspberry, and the Chinese herb dong quai with herbs that reduce menstrual cramping and pain (meadowsweet, lobelia, and black cohosh). It is helpful for PMS where dysmenorrhea (painful periods) are a part of the symptoms. It relaxes cramps, improves pelvic circulation to relieve congested feelings, and tones the female organs.

Christopher's Female Tonic Formula

This blend, crafted by the famous herbalist, Dr. John Christopher, contains herbs that work on a variety of PMS symptoms. It contains false unicorn, partridge berry, and blessed thistle, which help to balance hormones, calming down excess estrogen in particular (PMS type A). This is helpful for women who experience heavy bleeding, anxiety, and irritability during their periods. It also contains cramp bark, which eases menstrual cramping, uva ursi, for fluid retention during the periods, and ginger to stimulate pelvic circulation.

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discomfort in the breasts or pelvis. Mix one teaspoon of each in a quart of water and sip throughout the day.

Besides the Kidney and Lymph Formulas, any good **Herbal Diuretic Formula** may be helpful. Just be sure to drink plenty of pure water, too. Also, as with other forms of PMS, low levels of magnesium and vitamin B6 are often involved, so supplementing with them may be helpful.



PMS Type P

P is for *pain*. Pain associated with menstruation is called *dysmenorrhea*. And while this is one of the minor PMS types that may or may not accompany PMS type A or D, there is nothing minor about it. It's the primary symptom that turns

PMS to PMDD. It may involve congestive or cramping pain in the pelvic area, as well as pain in the joints, back, or head. This pain is caused by an increased level of pro-inflammatory prostaglandins during this part of the cycle.

To reduce this inflammation, start by supplementing with omega-3 essential fatty acids, which helps promote anti-inflammatory prostaglandins. It may also help to take an **Anti-Inflammatory Pain Formula** containing boswellia, mangosteen pericarp, turmeric, and white willow bark to reduce inflammation and ease pain.

If the pain is associated with muscle cramps and spasms, then magnesium is specifically called for, since cramping is a common sign of magnesium deficiency. Cramping can also be eased by antispasmodic herbs, which include lobelia, kava kava, cramp bark, black cohosh, and wild yam. An **Antispasmodic Formula** containing these herbs should be helpful.

Some women experience congestive pain in the abdominal area, which is more dull and achy, rather than sharp and cramping. This is due to a congested liver and/or lymphatic system and can be eased by remedies that improve blood flow to this area. Ginger and dong quai are two helpful herbs for this type of pain.

PMS Type S

S is for *skin*. Some women get outbreaks of acne due to higher levels of androgens (male hormones) during their cycle. Chaste tree berries can be a helpful remedy for this type of PMS because they help balance hormones via the pituitary gland and have been used to clear up hormone-related acne in teenagers.

The liver is also involved in this PMS type, so one of the **Female Tonic Formulas** listed on page 3 may be helpful, especially the Chinese formulas. An **Ayurvedic Skin Healing Formula**, containing ingredients like dandelion, Chinese yam, neem, sarsaparilla root, and turmeric is another option.

Heavy Menstrual Bleeding

Even though it is not a type of PMS, because it happens during, not before, the period, heavy menstrual bleeding is a problem many women experience. It can have many causes, including fibroids, polyps, and endometriosis, so a medical diagnosis is helpful in determining what to do.

However, there are herbs that help reduce heavy menstrual flow, including yarrow, bayberry root bark, capsicum, and lady's mantle. An **Internal Bleeding Formula** containing some of these herbs along with chaste tree, and false unicorn to balance excess estrogen, may be helpful.

Additional Help and Information

For more information about how to solve problems with PMS contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

Every Woman's Herbal by Dr. John R. Christopher and Cathy Gileadi

The Complete Woman's Herbal by Anne McIntyre

Women's Herbs, Women's Health by Christopher Hobbs and Kathi Keville

Women's Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine by Tori Hudson

Herbal Remedies for Women by Amanda McQuade Crawford

Herbal Healing for Women by Rosemary Gladstar