
DR. BONNET SPEAKS OUT: PMS

A nutritional and homeopathic approach

A number of you have requested a newsletter devoted to premenstrual syndrome (PMS). I had a couple of reservations. The first was “Would something that could only affect women of child-bearing years be of interest to enough of our readers?” I quickly realized between wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, co-workers, etc. that most of us deal with PMS in some way.

The second reservation was not as quickly dispelled. I believe you must experience something to truly know it. Unlike hypoglycemia, candidiasis, food allergies, chemical sensitivity or pyroluria my only experience was secondhand. After considerable thought I realized that my lack of firsthand experience had not interfered with my ability to hear patients describe their bodies getting swollen or bloated, their becoming irritable or depressed the week to ten days before their monthly menstrual flow. Nor had it interfered with my determination to offer effective treatment. So why not a newsletter?

As a medical student, I wondered “*What is this thing that causes nearly fifty percent of women during the child-bearing years to go through such suffering on a regularly recurring basis?*”

When I asked the professor of gynecology, his answer shocked me and amused most of the class, “PMS is just the price of being a woman.” (In other words – nothing could be done, it was just ‘a faulty design.’) I couldn’t believe this. A quick check in the medical school library however, revealed that outside the industrialized nations PMS was unknown.

How does our industrialized lifestyle create this vulnerability to PMS? Two known factors that contribute are consuming too much sugar and too much sodium. As a woman is coming to the end of her monthly menstrual cycle her hormones cause her to retain sodium and with it water. Her breasts can swell and her abdomen can bloat, by their physical structure, both are elastic enough to allow for these changes. But, her brain is in a closed container with no ability to expand so the pressure increases, causing the more serious problems of irritability, clumsiness and depression.

When you stop to consider how sodium is so excessively added to processed foods, it is really not surprising we have such a problem. Our modern palates have also been ‘trained’ to expect salt in most everything we eat.

The typical vegetable at harvest time has nine times as much potassium as it has sodium. But by the time it is on the plate ready to be eaten, there is generally nine times the sodium as potassium (this is an 8100% increase.) A low salt diet for at least the latter half of the menstrual cycle is a recommended first step in conquering PMS.

What about sugar? The problem with sugar is tied to the problems with candida, a yeast-like fungus that plagues so many of us. The symptoms from candida tend to be at their very worst a week to ten days before a woman begins her monthly menstrual flow. This is so typical that I generally question the diagnosis of candidiasis if there is no increased difficulty premenstrually. Since any refined carbohydrate can give candida a quick meal, causing it to multiply and produce toxins, eliminating simple sugars and refined carbohydrates from the diet helps relieve PMS symptoms.

The elimination of caffeine, at least three days before symptoms would be expected, is another recommendation. I suggest that we all limit our caffeine intake to no more than one caffeinated beverage a day. If you have been abusing caffeine, you must make your intake reduction gradual. Don't lower intake faster than 50% a week (if your cola, coffee, tea, hot chocolate intake averages eight servings a day, allow yourself a week to reduce it to four servings, a second week to reduce it to two, and so on). If you rush the process, you are likely to get caffeine withdrawal headaches.

There is some evidence that elimination of red meat and dairy may help the PMS patient. Drinking alcohol adds to the problem since it depletes the body's vitamin B and minerals. Alcohol is also toxic to the liver and can disrupt its ability to metabolize hormones. It also makes the problem of candidiasis worse.

Nutritional supplements can be most helpful. Vitamin B6 in a dosage of 100 to 500 mg taken after breakfast is usually sufficient to recall dreams and provide proper supplementation. When taking B6 it is important to also have enough zinc, 30 mg as gluconate is fine. Vitamin E 400 IU daily, magnesium 400mg daily, and evening primrose oil 500mg three times daily, have all proven helpful.

What else can be done to help with PMS? I have found homeopathy to be very helpful. Homeopathic remedies must "fit the person," so generally it would be necessary to be fully evaluated to find the correct remedy; but, but because low potency homeopathic remedies are so safe I will offer a few suggestions. While there are dozens of remedies that might be helpful for PMS, I'll mention six of the most frequently used. The first one, Lachesis, is so effective for helping problems that are relieved by discharges that anytime a symptom comes on premenstrually and improves dramatically with the start of flow Lachesis is worth trying. I used to use a complicated system of different potencies, but I have found it is often good, and sometimes better just to use a 8x multiple dose, 3 pellets, 3 times a day, require a closer fit to the person. See the chart at the end of this article.

One of the most important things to remember, there is help. If not to completely eliminate the problem – at least to reduce it to a livable situation. If you are suffering from any of the symptoms addressed and we have not discussed them in an office visit, please bring them to my attention at you next visit so we can begin your recovery.

What Can I Do To Get On The Road To Recovery?

One of the first suggestions is to keep a daily diary that includes: charting physical symptoms, recording diet, tracking exercise and noting emotional state. Although this seems like an overwhelming task, it will provide you and Dr. Bonnet in identifying your problem and determining your personal program for recovery.

What Help Can Others Give To Women with PMS?

This is perhaps the most difficult question of all. The answers vary as much as do any question of all. The answers vary as much as do any group of individuals. Understanding is one overall answer. Knowing that the woman has a physical problem and that she is not trying to be difficult is important. If a problem seems out of control, perhaps waiting until the symptoms subside to deal with important issues is also helpful. At the same time don't dismiss the woman's feelings because she is premenstrual.

Helping might be as simple as a hug in some cases or taking a wide berth and steering clear of controversy for a few days in other cases. If possible, encouraging the individual to visit the office to establish a personal recovery program and supporting her while she develops a healing routine is probably the biggest help.

FOOD FOR THE BODY

When dealing with PMS, diet and nutrition are critical. In fact, for example, studies show that what a girl eats in childhood affects her early periods. The importance of good nutrition in controlling PMS can not be stressed enough. No medication or supplement program can overcome the effects of a poor diet. Not only will diet play a critical role in recovery, but good nutrition will help the supplement program to really do its job.

Most people's diet can stand a great deal of improvement, however like everything else, it is critical to remember that change isn't going to happen overnight. Bad eating habits might have existed for years, don't beat yourself up for devouring a bag of potato chips or enjoying a hot fudge sundae – just slowly replace bad habits with good ones and surprisingly craving for unsavory foods will fade as the body cleanses itself.

The PMS patient will want to concentrate on a diet, which includes:

- Vegetables: leafy greens, beets, beans, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, brussel sprouts, carrots, garlic, onions, radishes, squash, yams, turnips and peas.
- Whole grains: brown rice, millet, oatmeal, barley, rye, and wheat (unless you are allergic to it).
- Seeds and nuts: almonds, walnuts, or peanuts, pumpkin, sunflower or sesame seeds.
- Fruit: apples, berries, and pears.

- Oils: olive, sesame, canola, and safflower.
- Meats: poultry and fish.

It is also critical to maintain variety. Experiment with herbs and spices to replace salt in the diet. Eliminate processed foods as much as possible. Explore sugar free treats from your health food store. **BEWARE OF SUGAR SUBSTITUTES** (NutraSweet, saccharin), these are chemicals and present another set of problems. Stevia, extracted from a South American herb, is a good alternative to chemical sweeteners.

IN STEP

Next to nutrition, exercise is the most critical step in PMS recovery. Exercise will help to ease stress and improve operation of all body functions. Exercise is also helpful in reducing stress, which frequently aggravates PMS symptoms. Increasing your regular exercise routine as PMS symptoms develop often help to release some of the problems. Most women note a deep sense of relaxation and peace after they exercise. (A note for the women's companion: perhaps suggesting a brisk walk, or joining an exercise class together would be a quick way to help.) Remember not to go overboard with an exercise program. Vigorous exercise can cause menstrual irregularity. Practice moderation.