

GMHC'S Nutrition & Wellness Program

WOMEN'S HEALTH: PMS



PRE-MENSTRUAL SYNDROME (PMS)

Usually occurs 2-10 days before a period. Mental and physical symptoms include tender breasts, water retention, fatigue, diarrhea, constipation, depression, severe irritability and emotional behavior.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO EASE SYMPTOMS?

Adopting a healthier lifestyle can improve symptoms as well as benefit your overall health: Choose healthy foods, exercise regularly, get enough sleep, don't smoke and reduce stress in your life.

DIET:

There are many foods that may worsen pre-menstrual discomfort:

- **Caffeine-** Breast tenderness, increased irritability and anxiety can be caused by caffeine. Instead, try caffeine-free colas or decaffeinated coffee, tea or herbal teas.

- **Salt-** Too much salt can cause the body to hold onto extra fluid, increasing bloating and breast tenderness. Try flavoring foods with herbs, spices, or non-salt seasonings, such as Mrs. Dash, and use low-salt canned and processed foods. Fast food is often high in salt so try to only consume moderate amounts prior and during your period.
- **Chocolate-** Chocolate can often worsen mood swings and breast tenderness. When you crave it buy the best quality chocolate you can afford and eat a small piece or have hot chocolate with skim milk instead.
- **Alcohol, refined sugar products and fatty foods** – Use moderate amounts of these foods and beverages which can use up the body's supply of B vitamins. Eat fruit instead of candy and crackers. When you crave fatty foods try some nuts or add avocado to sandwiches and salads.

The following foods may help to relieve or prevent PMS symptoms:

- **Soy** - Soy foods such as tofu, soy milk or tempeh
- **Complex carbohydrates**– Eating a small amount of whole wheat pasta, whole-grain cereal or bread every few hours can help keep your blood sugar from falling low.
- **Calcium, magnesium and B6-** Getting more calcium, magnesium, and B6 before your period may reduce cramping, back pain, bloating, irritability and depression.

- Try eating more leafy vegetables, whole grains, bananas, skim milk, and baked potatoes.

EXERCISE:

Exercise can be very helpful in reducing PMS symptoms. Try to find an activity you enjoy so that you will be more likely to stick with it. The overall goal should be 3-5 times per week for at least 30 minutes.

RELAXATION:

Our minds and bodies are not separate and clearly affect one another. Too much stress is unhealthy and can worsen PMS. Try to have enough “down time” every day.

Create a calming space for yourself and try some of the following suggestions:

- Schedule some time to relax and do nothing
- Do breathing exercises or meditate
- Take a hot bath or pamper yourself
- Get a massage
- Listen to your favorite music
- Drink a soothing cup of chamomile tea

