

Managing PMS: Diet and Nutrition

Maintaining a healthy diet helps your body counter PMS. Certain foods boost serotonin levels and give you the energy to cope with symptoms. Other foods can be avoided to ease symptoms.



Nutrients in fresh fruits and vegetables can help you manage PMS.

About supplements

Ask your healthcare provider about supplements before trying them.

Benefits of a balanced diet

To counter PMS symptoms, maintain a balanced diet. Eat foods from all the food groups: dairy, grains, fruits and vegetables, and protein. When planning meals, know that:

- **Calcium** may ease mood swings, headache, bloating, and irritability. It's found in dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yogurt. Some juices, breads, cereals, and soy products have calcium added (fortified).
- **Magnesium** may relieve bloating and breast tenderness. It's found in many foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables. To help your body get enough magnesium, eat 5 or more servings of a variety of fruits and vegetables a day.
- **Vitamin B-6** helps the body use serotonin, thereby helping to ease depression. It's found in chicken, fish, potatoes, eggs, and carrots.
- **Vitamin E** may reduce headache and breast tenderness. It's found in nuts such as almonds, peanuts, and hazelnuts. It's also found in green leafy vegetables.

"Good mood" foods

Eating foods high in carbohydrates (carbs) and fiber can help you manage PMS. That's because carbs raise serotonin levels. Carbs are also your body's main source of energy. To help keep energy and serotonin levels steady, eat small amounts throughout the day. High-fiber carbs include:

- **Whole-grain foods.** Brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, whole-grain bread, and buckwheat noodles are good choices.
- **Fresh fruits and vegetables.** These are especially fiber-rich when eaten unpeeled.
- **Beans and legumes.** These include kidney beans, peas, and lentils.

Foods to limit

Some foods can make PMS symptoms worse. Know that:

- **Salt** can cause bloating. Since canned vegetables are often high in salt, buy fresh instead. Flavor with herbs, lemon, or salt-free seasonings.
- **Sugar** is a carb that provides only short bursts of energy. If you crave sugar, choose a food that's also high in fiber, like an unpeeled apple or a bran muffin.
- **Caffeine** can disrupt sleep, which makes symptoms harder to cope with. Caffeine can also cause breast tenderness. Try to limit chocolate and caffeinated drinks, such as coffee or soda.
- **Alcohol** can make you feel depressed and can disrupt sleep. Many kinds of alcohol are also high in sugar. You may try limiting the amount of alcohol you drink.

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Managing PMS: Lifestyle Changes

Coping with PMS takes energy. But PMS symptoms can make you feel like you don't have the strength to cope. The key is to work helpful strategies into your daily life. Be active during the day and get enough sleep at night. Take time to relax. And don't be afraid to ask for support.

Being active

- Activity raises the amount of oxygen in your body. This makes you feel better and gives you more energy. Exercise may also raise serotonin levels. For best results:
 - Try aerobic activities, such as walking, jogging, biking, swimming, or yoga.
 - Exercise for 30 minutes, most days of the week. If this seems like too much, start with 10 minutes a day and work your way up.
 - Find ways to fit activity into your day. Try taking the stairs instead of the elevator.



Sleeping well

When you're tired, PMS symptoms can be harder to cope with. Aim for at least 8 hours of sleep a night. To sleep better:

- Follow a routine before bed. For instance, brush your teeth, read for half an hour, and turn out the lights at 10 p.m. every night.
- Pull down window shades and keep pets out of the bedroom. If you're a light sleeper, try wearing earplugs and an eye mask to block out noise and light.

Taking time to relax

Being relaxed can give you the energy to deal with life's ups and downs. This makes even PMS symptoms easier to cope with. Learn to relax through simple techniques you can do anytime, anywhere. If you think you're too busy, start with just 5 minutes a day. Try:

- Taking in a slow, deep breath through your nose. Hold it for 5 counts, then exhale through your mouth. Repeat this 3 times.
- Picturing yourself in a peaceful place, such as the countryside. Explore with your mind. Hear birds. Smell freshly cut grass. Enjoy a mental vacation.
- Stretching to relax muscles and reduce aches. (If you have back problems, ask your healthcare provider about stretches that are safe for you.)

Finding support

You don't have to deal with PMS alone. To help you cope:

- Talk with family and friends. Let them know how they can help when you're dealing with PMS symptoms.
- Chat with female friends. Support each other. You may learn some new coping strategies.
- Join a support group for women with PMS. Or try a stress management group. Ask your healthcare provider for resources.

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