

Pre-Menstrual Syndrome: Complementary/Alternative Medicine

B6 several hundred mg/d

(take B complex & C as well to complement the B6)

Recurrent signs and symptoms that develop during the seven to fourteen days prior to menstruation

Typical symptoms include: decreased energy level, tension, irritability, depression, headache, altered sex drive, breast pain, backache, abdominal bloating, and edema of the fingers and ankles

QUICK REVIEW

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) is estimated to affect between thirty and forty percent of menstruating women. The primary hormonal disturbance in PMS is that estrogen levels are elevated and progesterone levels are reduced.

An increased estrogen-to-progesterone ratio leads to impaired liver function, reduced levels of serotonin (an important mood-elevating neurotransmitter) in the brain, lower endorphin levels, impaired vitamin B6 activity, and alterations in other hormone levels.

- The primary nutritional recommendations for PMS are: increase consumption of plant foods (vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, nuts, and seeds); consume small-to-moderate quantities of meat and dairy products;

reduce fat and sugar intake; increase consumption of soy foods; eliminate caffeine intake; and keep salt intake low.

- Low thyroid function (hypothyroidism) has been shown to affect a large percentage of women who have PMS.

- Most women who have PMS tend to employ "negative" coping styles.

- Vitamin B6 and magnesium are the two most important nutritional supplements for treating PMS.

- The four most useful herbs in the treatment of PMS are angelica or dong quai, licorice root, black cohosh, and chaste berry.

- The use of progesterone creams should be reserved as the last choice after other natural measures have failed

TREATMENT SUMMARY

Here are the important steps to take to help you prioritize and implement the various measures detailed above:

1. Evaluate your PMS symptoms by completing the questionnaire in this chapter.

2. Rule out hypothyroidism and/or depression. Determine your basal body temperature (discussed in HYPOTHYROIDISM). If your basal body temperature is below 97.8 degrees Fahrenheit, or if you are suffering from other symptom: associated with PMS, consult your physician for complete thyroid-function testing. Determine whether depression may be a factor by taking the self-test in the DEPRESSION chapter. If it is, follow the recommendations given in that chapter.

3. Begin following the dietary recommendations for PMS:

- Follow a vegetarian or predominantly vegetarian diet

- Reduce your intake of fat

- Eliminate sugar intake

- Reduce exposure to environmental estrogens in foods

- Increase your intake of soy foods • Eliminate caffeine intake

- Keep salt intake low

4. Follow the guidelines for nutritional supplementation given in this chapter.

5. Select the appropriate herbal support:

- If you have PMS-associated breast pain, infrequent periods, or a history of ovarian cysts, take chasteberry extract [Take one of the following forms daily: fluid extract, 2 ml; dry powdered extract (0.5% agnuside content), 175 to 225 mg]
- If you typically experience menstrual cramps, take angelica (dong quai) [One of the following forms can be taken three times per day: powdered root or as tea, 1-2 g, tincture (1:5), 4 ml (1 tsp); fluid extract, 1 ml (1/4 tsp)]
- If you are bothered by PMS water retention, take licorice [One of the following forms can be taken three times per day: powdered root or as tea, 1-2 grams; fluid extract (1:1), 4 ml (1 tsp)]