

## **Mother Nurture**

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### ***Mothers and PMS***

*Since becoming a mom, I've begun experiencing more intense PMS. Is this normal? And what can I do?*

Yes, studies have shown that having children increases the chance of having more intense PMS. While it's not going to put you in the hospital - though the prospect of that kind of rest may sometimes sound pretty good! - PMS can have a significant impact on your mood, sense of worth, irritability, and relationships many days a month. But happily, there's a lot you can do about it:

#### **General Well-Being**

This is the foundation of hormonal health. Make the basics a priority: protein with every meal, regular vitamin/mineral/essential-fatty-acid supplements, sleep over housework, cultivating personal practices that feed your innermost being, and a relentless focus on lowering stress.

#### **Exercise**

One study showed that women who participate in sports experience less PMS than those who don't. Regular massages can help as well.

#### **Diet**

Consume less (or no) sugar, salt, refined carbohydrates, caffeine, alcohol, and dairy products. Increase your intake of fruits, vegetables, and other fiber-rich complex carbohydrates. Additionally, there are two kinds of foods with natural chemicals that can help with PMS: the cruciferous vegetables (e.g., broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage) and soy products.

#### **Supplements**

On top of a generally healthy diet—and consistent supplementation of essential fatty acids, vitamins, and minerals (especially calcium)—adding intensive daily doses of one or more of the nutrients below could bring greater balance to your menstrual cycle, particularly if that nutrient is lacking in your body:

- Vitamin B6 - Take as 100 mg pyridoxine (or 50 mg of pyridoxal-5-phosphate) an hour before eating breakfast or taking supplements containing minerals

- Vitamin E - Take 800 IU
- Magnesium - Take 800–1000 mg, ideally as magnesium glycinate; decrease if there is soft stool or diarrhea

Additionally, some women benefit from the essential fatty acid GLA found in evening primrose oil, especially for breast tenderness.

### **Herbs**

- The Chinese combination formula Dan Zhi Xiao Yao San - Follow the instructions on the bottle, or from your acupuncturist.
- The single herb, Dong Quai, is found in most Chinese formulas for women's health problems, and you can try it individually (in a 1:5 tincture, 1 teaspoon 3 times a day), although it's generally best in a formula.
- The Western herb, Vitex agnus-castus (chasteberry), has been shown to be helpful for PMS, but do not take it if you are using oral contraceptives. Try a standardized extract containing 0.5 percent agnuside, taking 175–225 mg/day.

### **Natural Hormones**

The research evidence is mixed for using progesterone to reduce PMS, perhaps because this hormone is a factor for a subgroup of women. If you explore this option, we recommend you do so under the care of a licensed health care provider.

### **Western medicine**

If you try some of the suggestions above and your PMS remains moderate to severe, consider asking your physician about:

- Oral contraceptive agents (OCAs)—a.k.a. “the pill”
- Fluoxetine (Prozac, Serafem)—and perhaps other antidepressants—that can sometimes relieve the depressed mood some women have with PMS, and perhaps other discomfort as well

We wish you the best!

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*(Rick Hanson, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist, Jan Hanson, M.S., L.Ac., is an acupuncturist/nutritionist, and they are raising a daughter and son, ages 14 and 17. With Ricki Pollycove, M.D., they are the first and second authors of [Mother Nurture: A Mother's Guide to Health in Body, Mind, and Intimate Relationships](#), published by Penguin. You can see their website at [www.nurturemom.com](http://www.nurturemom.com) or email them with questions*

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