



How Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is Different from Premenstrual Syndrome

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) is a condition that is present in about 40% of women in their child bearing years. It is characterized by troublesome physical and/or emotional symptoms that are present in the last 7 to 10 days of the menstrual cycle (before the menstrual flow). Some of these symptoms may include: bloating, headaches, irritability, weight gain, food cravings, mood swings, fatigue, breast tenderness and tearfulness. Each affected woman presents a different combination of some of these symptoms, which may also differ from month to month.

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is a condition associated with predominantly severe psychological symptoms which cause disruption of the daily lives of affected women. Dysphoria is derived from the Greek word *dusphoros*, which means hard to bear. The symptoms of PMDD are recurrent. They usually start 7 to 10 days before menstruation and decrease within a few days of the onset of menstrual flow. Then, they disappear completely until the next premenstrual phase.

How common is PMDD and what are the risk factors?

Studies have found that between 3% and 5% of menstruating women have PMDD. A few studies suggest that women with a personal or family history of postpartum depression, unipolar depression, and mood changes induced by oral contraceptives may be at greater risk of developing PMDD.

What are the symptoms of PMDD?

Unlike PMS, PMDD symptoms are very severe, completely disrupting the lives of women affected by it. Women diagnosed with PMDD usually present 5 or more of the following symptoms:

- Very depressed mood, feelings of hopelessness
- Marked anxiety, tension, feelings of being “on edge”

- Marked mood shifts (e.g., suddenly feeling tearful or extremely sensitive)
- Persistent or marked anger or irritability or increased interpersonal conflicts
- Decreased interest in usual activities (e.g., work, school, friends, hobbies)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue, tiredness, loss of energy
- Marked change in appetite, overeating, food cravings
- Insomnia (difficulty sleeping) or sleeping too much
- Feeling out of control or overwhelmed
- Physical symptoms such as breast tenderness or swelling, headaches, joint or muscle pain, “bloating”, weight gain

These symptoms do not necessarily occur every cycle, but they are present in the majority of the cycles. Some months may be worse than others. For an accurate diagnosis of PMDD, it is important to keep a Mood Chart for at least two consecutive months.

Also, it is important to have a complete medical evaluation and laboratory tests in order to rule out other possible medical problems.

What are the treatments for PMDD?

There are 3 main approaches that can be used to alleviate the symptoms of PMDD, such as:

Psychological

- Stress reduction (e.g., rearranging schedule to decrease stress during the premenstrual week)
- Cognitive-behaviour therapy
- Relaxation techniques

Our Sisters' Place is a community-based support network for women, with a focus on mood disorders associated with hormonal changes throughout the lifespan. “Our Sisters' Place provides support, information and education as a complement to traditional and alternative therapies. OSP services are not intended as a replacement for other treatment options and encourages individuals to seek treatment by a qualified health care professional.”

Our Sisters' Place is a program of **Mood Disorders Association of Ontario (MDAO)**

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Healthy life style

- Dietary changes: reduce salt, alcohol, caffeine
- Reduce or stop smoking
- Exercise
- Take a daily dose of vitamin B6, calcium (speak with your health care provider about this and other dietary supplements)

Medications

- Antidepressants (SSRIs)
- Anti-anxiety medication
- Hormone therapy

References

Concise Guide to Women's Mental Health. Vivien Burt and Victoria Hendrick. American Psychiatric Publishing Inc., Second Edition, 2001.

DSM-IV-TR – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. American Psychiatric Association. Fourth Edition, 2000.

PMDD: A guide to coping with Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder. James E. Houston & Lani C. Fujitsubo. New Harbinger Publications, Inc., First Edition, 2000.

Web resources

PMDD and Menstruation
www.pddd-and-menstruation.com/

Medem – Medical Library
www.medem.com/ (keyword search: PMDD)

Facts for Health – PMDD
www.factsforhealth.org

