

A Naturopathic Approach to PMS

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Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is one of the most common female problems, affecting 30-40% of women during their reproductive years. The most severe cases occur in approximately 2% of women between the ages of 26 and 35. PMS is characterized by recurrent symptoms that appear 7-14 days before a woman has her menstrual period. These symptoms often include: decreased energy, irritability, increased appetite (usually sugar cravings), acne, and bloating. Menstrual cramps (dysmenorrhea), while technically a separate diagnosis, can also be attributed to the same hormonal fluctuations that cause PMS. Naturopathic therapies can be a good way to alleviate these symptoms in women who choose to avoid pharmaceutical intervention or are not receiving enough relief from the common treatments used by medical doctors, i.e. birth control pills, anti-depressants, and anti-anxiety drugs.

PMS symptoms can be divided into 4 distinct categories:

1. PMS-A (A = anxiety) includes symptoms of anxiety, irritability, and emotional instability. It encompasses the most common PMS symptoms and is found to be strongly associated with excessive estrogen and deficient progesterone.
2. PMS-C (C = carbohydrate craving) includes symptoms of increased appetite, craving for sweets, headache, fatigue, fainting spells, and heart palpitations. Although there is no clear mechanism of cause for these symptoms, they seem to be related to an excessive insulin response to sugar consumption.
3. PMS-D (D = depression) is the least common category of symptoms and is associated with low levels of estrogen, leading to increased breakdown of neurotransmitters in the brain.
4. PMS-H (H = hyperhydration) is characterized by weight gain greater than 3 pounds, abdominal bloating and discomfort, breast tenderness and congestion, and occasional swelling of the face, hands, and ankles. These symptoms are attributed to an increase in the hormone aldosterone, which increases fluid retention.

Usually, a woman will have a combination of symptoms from the different categories of PMS. The categories are used as general guidelines to help address the underlying problems related to the syndrome. It is important that your doctor rule out underlying medical conditions, like hypothyroidism, anemia and depression. Once these underlying medical conditions are addressed, the naturopathic approach to easing PMS symptoms has to do with helping the whole body heal to allow the patient to heal herself.

Putting the Pieces Together

A holistic therapy regimen, recommended by a naturopathic physician, would be used to integrate multiple therapies for helping the patient's body to heal. This regimen would consist of a combination of therapies, including diet, exercise, nutritional supplements, homeopathy, and botanical medicines (herbs).

- ? Diet: is very important for successful long-term benefits. This would include general healthy eating strategies, along with reducing sugar, salt, caffeine and animal fat intake. Proper hydration with at least 64 oz of water daily is also important.

- ? Exercise: can be of great benefit for reducing PMS symptoms. A variety of different types of exercises will help certain people, including high impact workouts like jogging, biking, and dancing or low impact exercises like yoga and Tai Chi.
- ? Nutritional supplements: are often used to address deficiencies or increased need for vitamins and minerals like B6, magnesium and calcium. Other supplements may be used to improve liver detoxification or balance gastrointestinal flora.
- ? Homeopathy: is a therapy in which a single homeopathic remedy is given to the patient based on all of their physical, mental, and emotional symptoms to stimulate the body to heal itself.
- ? Botanical medicines: are very effective in helping the body to balance hormone levels, improve liver detoxification, and reduce the effects of stress on the body. Four of the most commonly used herbs for PMS are angelica root (dong quai), licorice root, black cohosh, and chasteberry.

Using naturopathic therapies to ease the symptoms of PMS involves addressing multiple factors of the woman's underlying health to allow her body to heal itself. By taking this unique approach, a naturopathic physician can also address many of a person's other health concerns with the same therapy regimen.

The examples given here are for illustrative purposes and should not be used without consulting a qualified medical professional.

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