

Research reveals understanding PMS can reduce women's distress

October 19 2009

(PhysOrg.com) -- Women can significantly improve 'that time of the month,' by learning more about how premenstrual symptoms (PMS) can affect their minds and bodies and by adopting stress management and relaxation techniques.

Leading women's health researchers, Professor Jane Ussher and Dr Janette Perz from the University of Western Sydney, have conducted a study of the effectiveness of psychological interventions for PMS.

The findings reveal that both one-to-one and self-help therapies can improve women's overall experience of PMS, as well as ameliorate PMS symptoms.

"PMS is a major health problem which causes significant psychological changes such as stress, [depression](#), and an inability to function socially," says Professor Ussher from the UWS School of Psychology.

"By understanding how their bodies work, as well as the patterns of their thoughts and feelings, women can learn to cope better with PMS - which can, in turn, lead to a reduction in their psychological symptoms."

As part of the UWS study, women between the ages of 20 and 45 were issued with PMS self-help information packages or recruited to participate in specialist three-month psychological treatment programs.

The self-help packs and treatment sessions gave each participant the

opportunity to explore the psychological symptoms of PMS, as well as learn effective problem-solving, relaxation and stress management techniques.

According to Professor Ussher, the outcomes of the study indicate that psychological treatments can have a gradual and lasting impact on PMS. "The psychological treatments aimed to change the women's patterns of thinking and coping, which acted to reposition PMS as something they could deal with," says Professor Ussher.

"For many of the study participants, this led to a significant reduction in their feelings of depression, guilt and anxiety and, although the physical symptoms of PMS were still present, these were of a lesser magnitude and were no longer distressing."

Professor Ussher says there is long-held perception that the ideal woman is calm, caring and always able to cope, which puts everyday women under great pressure to be perfect and competent all the time.

"The therapy sessions and self-help packs were designed to challenge the perceptions of how women 'should' be, and tell women that they should not feel guilty about their body's normal responses premenstrually," she says.

"For most women, there is no need to rely on medications. Premenstrual symptoms can be effectively and satisfactorily treated with lifestyle changes, cognitive behaviour therapy, exercise and dietary regulation. All women need is sufficient access to psychological services or the opportunity to learn the skills that are necessary to self-treat their symptoms."

Professor Ussher and Dr Perz are carrying out an additional study to compare the individual and self-help treatment programs with a three-

month psychological treatment program designed for couples.

Provided by University of Western Sydney ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Research reveals understanding PMS can reduce women's distress (2009, October 19)
retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-10-reveals-pms-women-distress.html>

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