

PMS: What it is, symptoms, and how to get relief

May 31 2023, by Sue Benzuly



Are you tired of feeling moody, bloated and achy every month right

before you get your period?

You're not alone. Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is a common condition that affects many women. Here, experts explore what PMS is, its [symptoms](#) and, most importantly, how to find relief from those pesky monthly symptoms. Keep reading to understand your body better, learn how to manage PMS, understand the subtle differences between early [pregnancy](#) symptoms and PMS, and when you should seek professional help.

What is PMS?

PMS refers to the collection of symptoms that typically occur in a predictable pattern that coincides with a woman's menstrual cycle. When does PMS start? According to [Women'sHealth.gov](#), PMS starts after ovulation and ends with the onset of menses. Researchers believe that the symptoms are caused by a dramatic decrease in estrogen and progesterone hormones that occurs if you are not pregnant.

PMS symptoms

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), the common symptoms of PMS include:

Emotional symptoms:

- Tension/anxiety
- Depressive mood
- Crying spells
- Mood swings, including irritability or anger
- Appetite changes, which may include food cravings
- Insomnia
- Social withdrawal

- Poor concentration
- Change in libido (sex drive)

Physical symptoms:

- Joint or muscle pain
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Weight gain related to fluid retention
- Abdominal bloating
- Breast tenderness
- Acne flare-up
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Alcohol intolerance

PMS symptoms versus pregnancy symptoms

PMS and early pregnancy share several common symptoms, which may have you wondering what is happening with your body. The [Cleveland Clinic](#) lists the following symptoms of pregnancy, which can also occur with PMS:

- Tender breasts
- Fatigue
- Mood swings
- Acne
- Bloating
- Food cravings

But [Penn Medicine](#) notes several key differences between the symptoms of pregnancy and PMS.

Although your breasts may be tender during PMS and early pregnancy, a

key difference is that your nipples may become sensitive or painful when pregnant. Don't be alarmed; this typically passes after a few weeks.

Morning sickness does not typically occur with PMS, so if you are nauseous or vomiting, this is not typical of PMS and may indicate pregnancy. Also, [morning sickness](#) is a misnomer; it can occur all day.

Fatigue typically goes away when you begin your period. If your fatigue is persistent, even after your period's due date, it may indicate pregnancy, especially if your period is missed.

Another confusing sign is bleeding. Some women experience bleeding when the embryo implants into the uterine wall. This occurs about six to 12 days after ovulation. Light spotting and cramping can occur at that time. The most significant difference between your period and implantation bleeding is the amount of blood. Implantation bleeding is ordinarily light, while a heavier flow would indicate that your period has arrived.

The best way to know if it is PMS or pregnancy is to take a [home pregnancy test](#). Penn Medicine recommends waiting until the first day of your missed period. This will give the most accurate result. The test measures the pregnancy hormone human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG). Waiting for the first day of your missed period allows your body to build up enough of the hormone for the test to detect it. Testing too early can lead to a false negative test result.

PMS symptom relief

[Johns Hopkins Medicine](#) offers many recommendations for PMS [symptom](#) relief. They include over-the-counter (OTC) remedies, prescribed medications and lifestyle changes.

OTC remedies:

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs) such as aspirin or ibuprofen, to reduce pain
- Vitamin supplements such as B6, calcium and magnesium have been shown to reduce symptoms

Prescribed medications:

- Birth control pills: The steady release of hormones helps minimize PMS symptoms
- Medications to temporarily stop ovaries from making progesterone and estrogen
- Antidepressants: These work by increasing serotonin levels in the brain
- Water pills: These decrease bloating

Lifestyle changes:

- Exercise, because just 30 minutes of aerobic exercise can reduce the intensity of symptoms
- Eat a [balanced diet](#), including foods high in protein, whole grains and vegetables
- Decrease your intake of salt, sugar and caffeine
- Get adequate sleep and rest
- Don't smoke

Interestingly, a study published in the [Journal of Education and Health Promotion](#) showed "that both aerobic exercise and yoga movements significantly reduced pain intensity and PMS symptoms. Significant reduction in PMS symptoms was found in patients treated with yoga compared to [aerobic exercise](#)."

The Cleveland Clinic says that although PMS is common, you don't need to tolerate the symptoms. And if the symptoms of PMS interfere with your everyday lifestyle, it is time to see your health care provider for treatments tailored to you.

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