



# PMS

## TIPS FOR COPING

**N**ot every woman feels she's possessed by an alien from another planet just before her period. Some don't notice any change in disposition, eating or sleeping habits through the month, while others have only mild changes. But some women experience marked changes in mood or habits a few days or a few weeks before the onset of their menstrual period. Understanding PMS (premenstrual syndrome) and what you can do to reduce or control its symptoms can help prevent it from gaining an upper hand in your life.

### What Is PMS?

PMS is the name given to the collection of physiological changes brought on by the natural cycle of fertility and culminating in the onset of menstrual flow. Physically, PMS can manifest itself by swollen or tender breasts and water retention.

### Changes In Appetite

Some women's appetites increase or decrease, while other women experience cravings for specific food types, such as candy or bread. These mild symptoms and any attendant weight gain usually disappear at the onset of menstruation. Sticking to a healthy diet, avoiding alcohol and getting plenty of exercise during this time can help you feel your best.

### Changes In Mood

Irritability is a common symptom of PMS. If you're normally easy going and suddenly find you're increasingly irritable or angry on a regular basis, you might want to keep track of your moods in a diary or calendar to see if these mood changes are tied into your menstrual cycle. They will generally show up at approximately the same time every month.

### Changes In Sleep Habits

The same kinds of changes can occur in sleep habits, with your normal sleep cycle increasing or decreasing temporarily. Some women experience an overwhelming sleepiness just a couple of days before menstruation begins. Sleep changes, especially a decrease in the ability to sleep or an increase in bad dreams, can work in concert with your mood, making you more irritable than you might be if you were sleeping normally.

### What You Can Do

If you're seriously bothered by monthly changes, keep a diary of symptoms for a couple of months and then get a physical checkup. The diary will help you present your doctor with actual examples of the kinds of changes you undergo.

A small number of women have more serious disorders tied to the hormonal changes of the fertility cycle. These disorders are sometimes treatable with medication. Your doctor should be able to identify them and might recommend a specialist for treatment.

