

Nutritional Therapy For PMS

The following is a nutritional approach which may help decrease or eliminate many of the symptoms associated with premenstrual syndrome. New knowledge is rapidly accumulating to convince us that what we eat affects us in many ways. Numerous theories have been proposed about the role of nutrition in relation to PMS. Some studies have been done to try and confirm these theories, but many more studies are needed. What we tell you today may have to be modified tomorrow.

We have included the dietary guidelines and some of the reasons or theories for why they are recommended. Remember that the following suggestions are to encourage changes in your lifestyle. Ideally, we should limit the use of refined sugar, caffeine and alcohol in our diets and limit smoking. However, it can be difficult to change our habits completely overnight. We encourage you to begin making changes that over time will eventually lead you to establishing habits of nutrition and exercise that are vital for optimal health.

Change In Dietary Habits

- Limit your consumption of refined sugar to 5 teaspoons each day. Remember, sugar is hidden in many prepared foods and soft drinks. Try to make a habit of reading the ingredients on the package before you buy. If the ingredient listed first or second is sugar, it means the sugar content is very high.
 - After ingestion of large amounts of sugar, insulin increases abruptly which causes salt and water retention. Refined sugar also increases the urinary excretion of magnesium, which is not desirable in PMS.
- Limit your consumption of salt to 3,000 milligrams, which equals approximately 1 1/2 teaspoons per day. (The daily consumption of salt in the US averages between 6,000 and 18,000 milligrams) Salt, like sugar is also hidden in many prepared foods. Convenience foods like canned soup, frozen dinners, and package mixes are often high in sodium. Snack foods like a few handfuls of chips could send you over your salt allotment for the day!
 - Increased levels of salt cause water retention, which may have a significant influence on the symptoms of PMS. Salt also enhances insulin response to sugar ingestion and may make PMS symptoms worse.
- Increase your intake of cis-linoleic acid by using safflower oil in salads. Cooking will destroy this important nutrient. Two tablespoons each day are satisfactory.
 - Vegetable oils are rich sources of cis-linoleic acid which, along with magnesium and vitamin B6, are involved in the formation of prostaglandin PGE1. This prostaglandin decreases sugar-induced insulin secretion, which may have a stabilizing effect on blood sugar levels.
- Limit your intake of red meat to three ounces each day. This would be one small hamburger patty or small section of steak.
- Limit your consumption of fat (mainly saturated and animal fats) to less than 20% of your daily calories. This includes butter, bacon, fat in whole milk and in red meat and pork.
 - Animal fats are the main dietary sources of arachidonic acid, which is the precursor to the prostaglandin PGE2. This prostaglandin has antagonistic effects with regard to the prostaglandin PGE1. For this reason it is best to decrease the consumption of animal fats and increase consumption of vegetable oil.
- Try to eat foods that have high amounts of magnesium in relation to their calcium content. It is believed that magnesium deficiency could play a major role in PMS by two mechanisms:
 - Increasing susceptibility to stress.
 - Decreasing the absorption and increasing the excretion of lead.

- Excessive blood levels of lead have been associated with depression and other symptoms.
 - Magnesium also helps absorption and deposition of calcium into your bones where it belongs.
- Limit your dairy products to two servings per day.
 - Dairy products have ten times more calcium than magnesium. Calcium interferes with magnesium absorption. Magnesium decreases the demand for calcium, but calcium may increase the demand for magnesium.
- Rely more on fish, poultry, whole grains, and legumes as sources of protein and less on red meat and dairy products.
- Limit your intake of protein from all the protein-containing foods you eat to 1 gram per kilogram of your body weight each day. (1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds.)
 - Excess protein in the diet may interfere with vitamin and mineral metabolism and increase some symptoms of PMS.
- Increase your intake of complete carbohydrates to 60-70% of all your daily calories. Examples of these foods are potatoes, corn, rice, whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.
 - Complex carbohydrates are preferred over simple sugars because they stimulate insulin release in a less abrupt and more sustained manner. This produces a more even level of blood sugar and may benefit many PMS symptoms.
- Increase your consumption of green leafy vegetables. Be adventurous and try ones you haven't eaten before. Kale, Swiss chard and beet greens are excellent plain or in casseroles. For salads, leaf lettuce is much more nutritious than iceberg head lettuce. Green, leafy vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins and minerals.
- Limit alcohol to one ounce each day. This is equivalent to one glass of wine, beer or a mixed drink.
 - Alcohol affects the body by decreasing blood sugar which can trigger depression. Many women have observed that the effects of alcohol are more pronounced during the premenstrual phase. PMS may influence excessive alcohol intake in some women. Effective control of PMS may be beneficial to the treatment of alcoholism.
- Limit caffeine intake by decreasing consumption of coffee, tea and caffeine-containing soft drinks. Also limit chocolate to two small pieces per week.
 - These foods all contain a substance called methylxanthines. It has been reported that 65% of women who abstained from these foods had substantial improvement in their breast symptoms.

Nutritional Supplements For PMS

Certainly there is no substitute for a good, well-balanced diet. However, there has been some indication that certain vitamins and minerals may be helpful in decreasing many of the PMS symptoms.

- Vitamin B6 is one of the nutrients that may be very important in controlling PMS by stimulating certain liver enzymes. Dosages may range from 100 mg to 500 mg per day.
- Magnesium helps increase the activity of the B vitamins and increases absorption of calcium. Dosages may range from 80 mg to 500 mg per day.
- Vitamin E has been proven effective in decreasing breast symptoms. Dosage is 400-600 units per day. Vitamin E therapy should be used consistently for two months. If breast symptoms have improved, the therapy should be continued for six months.
- Vitamin A together with zinc and vitamin B6 may help decrease the premenstrual appearance of oily skin and acne occurring in some women. Dosage of vitamin A may range from 4,000 units to 12,500 units per day. Dosage of zinc may range from 8 mg to 25 mg per day.

