

Self Help for

Premenstrual Symptoms



This package is based on women centered therapy that has been found to be effective in treating women with Premenstrual Symptoms.

table of contents

This pack is based on women centred therapy that has been found to be effective in treating women with Premenstrual Syndrome. The research was conducted at The Gender, Culture and Health Research Unit, University of Western Sydney, and The Women's Health Research Unit, University College London

Ussher, JM, Perz, J. (2006) Evaluating the relative efficacy of a self-help and minimal psycho-educational intervention for moderate premenstrual distress conducted from a critical realist standpoint.

Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology 24(4) 347-362

Ussher, JM. (2006) *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the Reproductive Body*. London, Routledge.

Ussher, JM, Hunter, M & Cariss, M (2002) A women centred cognitive behavioural treatment package for premenstrual symptoms.

Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy 9, 3319-3331.

If you would like to share your experiences of the PMS self-help pack with us, or would like further information, you can email us at: pms@uws.edu.au,

Or write to:

PMS Study

Gender, Culture & Health Research Unit: PsyHealth

School of Psychology

University of Western Sydney

Locked Bag 1797

Penrith South DC NSW 1796

AUSTRALIA

acknowledgments

This pack was developed and written by Jane Ussher and Janette Perz, with research funding provided by University of Western Sydney, and Family Planning New South Wales, the latter in conjunction with Edith Weisberg. Sections of the pack are based on material developed as part of a face-to-face PMS intervention, by Jane Ussher, Myra Hunter and Margaret Cariss, at University College London, funded by a North Thames Health Authority research grant (see Ussher, Hunter & Cariss, 2002). Editorial support was provided by Beverly Johnson, Angela Pearce and Julie Mooney-Somers. Desktop publishing and design by Poppy Alexiou.

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	6
BEFORE & AFTER	7
SECTION ONE: Information about PMS	9
SECTION TWO: Taking care of yourself	14
SECTION THREE: Taking care of your needs	20
SECTION FOUR: Taking care of your relationships	33
SECTION FIVE: Taking care of your thinking	40
FINAL SUMMARY	48
FURTHER HELP	49
REFERENCES	50
APPENDICES	51

introduction

In this program we'll look at a number of things you can do to help manage PMS. The strategies we will introduce to you work well if you build them into your daily life on a regular basis. You can follow all of the strategies, or shape the suggestions in this pack to fit your own needs & life-style.

For example:

Women who are working, as well as looking after a family, will find the sections on managing stress & taking time out particularly helpful.

Women who are living with a partner will benefit from the sections concerning relationships & PMS.

Some things may be familiar to you & part of your normal daily routine.

Some things may be new.

If you use all of these strategies in combination, your symptoms should be reduced.

This pack is designed for women to use on their own, but it can also be used alongside strategies suggested by a health professional, such as a G.P., counsellor, or psychologist.

If you find that your symptoms don't change after 3 months of following this pack, we suggest that you talk to your G.P. about other sources of help.

We also recommend that all women who experience significant physical or psychological distress premenstrually, or at any other time in the month, visit their G.P. for a check-up, to ensure there isn't an underlying physical or psychological problem.

Lots of women have found this pack effective - we'll include quotes from them throughout. Those who said it worked for them told us that "what you put in, you get out". So make a contract with yourself before you start to try some of the strategies consistently for a few months. That way you stand to benefit most.

We hope it works for you.

before & after

Before you get started on the suggestions in this pack it's a good idea to see where things are at right now with your PMS. If you complete the survey on the next page before you try out some different ways to manage PMS, you will be able to see how, & in what ways you have benefited from the ideas contained in the pack. We have repeated the survey questions at the end of the pack so that you can fill them in again when you've been using the pack for a few months. Then you can compare how you were at the beginning with how you are after trying out the strategies.

We would also like to hear from you about what changes you have noticed since using the pack & what you thought of it. So we have also included some questions at the end & provided you with a reply-paid address you can use.

what is pms like for you now?

INSTRUCTIONS: PLEASE CIRCLE A NUMBER FROM 1 TO 10 FOR EACH QUESTION.

1. To what extent do you find your PMS distressing?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___|
(not at all distressing) (extremely distressing)

2. To what extent does PMS interfere with your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___|
(not at all) (very much indeed)

3. To what extent do you feel that you can deal with your PMS?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___|
(not at all) (very well indeed)

4. In most relationships there are some areas of tension between people & this can sometimes feel worse during the premenstrual phase. How much is this the case for you?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___|
(not at all) (a lot)

5. Can you indicate your level of desire to be alone premenstrually?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___| |___|
(not at all) (a lot)

information about pms

In this first section we'll go through: what this self-help PMS pack is about, what PMS is, what causes it, & how you can cope with your premenstrual changes to reduce distress.

The issues we'll cover are:

What is PMS?

Factors associated with PMS

How to reduce & cope with premenstrual symptoms

The term PMS is used to refer to the premenstrual symptoms or changes women experience before their period. It's sometimes called PMT (premenstrual tension).

Most women experience emotional & physical changes at this time of the month. For many women these changes don't interfere with their daily living. However between 20-40% of women seek help for their premenstrual changes at some point during their life.

The good news is that there are lots of things that a woman can do to reduce the impact of premenstrual changes.

The aim of this self-help package is to go through them.

The strategies we'll cover have been found, through clinical research, to be helpful in reducing premenstrual distress.

If you follow all of the guidelines, you should:

- Feel as though you can cope better
- Have better physical & psychological wellbeing
- See a reduction in your premenstrual symptoms.

Before we go into these strategies in detail, let's examine what PMS is.

What is PMS?

PREMENSTRUAL CHANGES

More than 150 different changes have been reported by women who experience PMS. These include changes in:

- Behaviour –feeling less able to do your normal activities, not being able to control your emotions in the way you usually can, withdrawing from others.
- Emotion –feeling depressed, anxious, irritable or angry.
- Physical –feeling tired, nauseous, bloated or in pain.

It's important to chart your daily mood & physical experiences across the menstrual cycle, so that you can understand your own pattern of changes.

This may vary from month to month.

If you make a note of other things that are happening in your life at the same time, you'll notice that your moods are influenced by daily life events & stresses - as well as by your menstrual cycle.

A sample daily diary is included at the end of this section & in the appendices.

“Now I know when my ‘off days’ are imminent & I can be prepared. I know when I am going to get PMS, it doesn't creep up on me anymore.”

information about pms

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PMS

Most people agree that premenstrual changes are caused by a combination of physical, psychological & social factors.

- Bio-chemical & hormonal changes in the body across the menstrual cycle.
- Stress, self-esteem, expectations, mood, & ways of coping.
- Life style factors, social support & demands from others.

Women are more sensitive or vulnerable in the premenstrual phase of the cycle - partly due to changes in hormones & brain chemicals.

This means that the stresses & strains of life can seem more difficult then. Or there can be a build up of pressure - many women say that they can cope with life for 3 weeks of the month, but premenstrually it can feel as though it's all too much.

This explains why many women say that their premenstrual symptoms disappear when they're on holiday, or when life is going well.

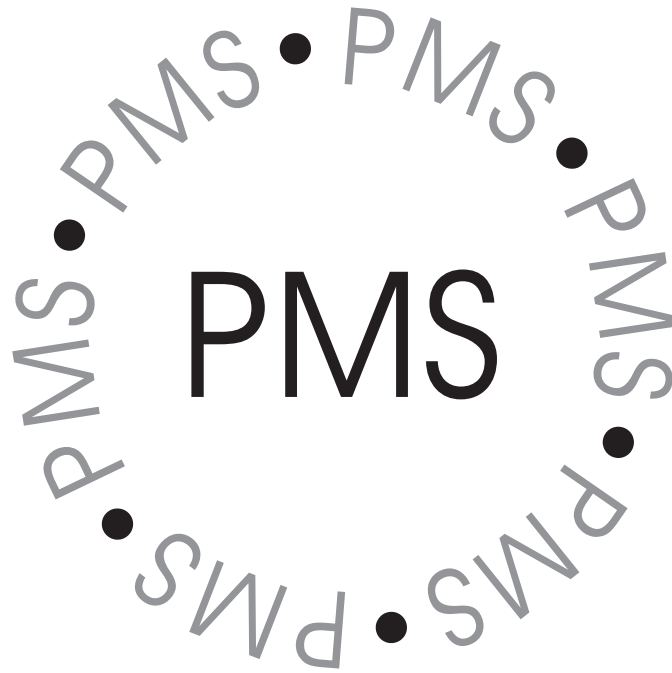
It also explains why premenstrual symptoms are more difficult when life is stressful - when there are problems in relationships, at work, or lots of demands from children. Or when a woman has no time for herself to do the things she enjoys.

The following diagram shows some of the factors that are linked to premenstrual changes.

FACTORS AFFECTING PREMENSTRUAL CHANGES

Biological Factors

- Changes in brain chemicals
- Changes in hormones



Psychological Factors

- Past life experiences
- Preferred life style
- Current stress levels
- Self-esteem
- Mood
- Ways of coping
- Ways of thinking
- Assertiveness
- Needs & concerns
- Personality

Social Factors

- Demands from others
- Lack of social support
- Financial pressures
- Women's multiple roles
- Relationship issues
- Problems at work
- Difficulty getting time for yourself
- Social environment

information about pms

HOW TO REDUCE & COPE WITH PREMENSTRUAL CHANGES

Because there are many causes of premenstrual distress, there isn't one simple way to alleviate the problem.

But, this doesn't mean that you can't do anything. Because many different aspects of a woman's life are linked to PMS, there are lots of things you can do to avoid the distress associated with premenstrual changes. These involve:

- Looking after your mind & body
- Reducing stress & increasing pleasure in your life
- Looking after your relationships
- Getting help & support from others

Key aspects are:

Look after yourself. Go easy on yourself - especially during the premenstrual period

&

Look after your mind & body. Reduce stress. Get support & help.

"I'm more aware of what's happening & when I do try & look after myself I notice a big difference in my PMS. When I don't look after myself as well as I should, my PMS is bad again."

If your life is full of stress, you have no time to do the things you enjoy, you're overwhelmed with responsibility, & you find it hard to eat a healthy diet or do exercise, your premenstrual changes are likely to be worse or to feel more overwhelming.

You need to avoid &/or try to decrease difficulties associated with premenstrual changes over the whole month. If you reduce stress, have a balanced life with time for yourself, eat a healthy diet & do exercise, & get support from others, you'll find that your premenstrual changes will have less impact. Some may even disappear. The strategies we'll cover will assist you to make these changes.

taking care of yourself

In this section we'll look at the importance of looking after your body throughout the whole month.

If you're physically healthy, eating a balanced diet, taking regular exercise, & able to find time to relax & get enough sleep, you'll be able to cope better with premenstrual changes.

The issues we'll cover are:

Looking after yourself:

- Through diet
- Through exercise
- By learning to relax

"I liked the fact that it involved simple things I could do in my everyday life rather than something like drugs. It helped me feel that it was OK to have symptoms of PMS & that on its own made me feel better about my PMS, but of course it was great to know there were things I could do."

Looking After Yourself Through Diet

Eating a healthy diet makes sense for everyone & will help your PMS. These guidelines will help to maintain a balance in your body, which decreases the impact of the hormonal & biochemical changes that take place over your cycle.

✓ Eat at least 3 meals each day & a healthy snack every 2 hours when you're premenstrual.

This helps

- to keep your blood sugar stable & reduces cravings.

- to reduce anxiety & tiredness.

Healthy snacks = fruit, whole-grain bread, small portions of nuts & dried fruit.

✓ Eat lean protein.

This includes foods like fish, chicken, soy, whole-grains, & lentils.

✗ Limit your intake of dairy products.

✓ Eat plenty of complex carbohydrates.

This helps to raise serotonin levels - which makes you feel much better. Sugar cravings may be due to a drop in serotonin levels.

You can ease or avoid them by eating more of these carbs.

This includes food such as wholemeal bread, pasta, potatoes & grains.

✗ Avoid refined carbohydrates

white flour products.

✗ Avoid food with a high sugar content.

Sugar increases prostaglandins in the body - this can lead to menstrual cramps. It also increases urinary excretion of magnesium, which can trigger emotional symptoms.

This includes adding sugar to drinks & food, cakes, biscuits, sweets, non-diet soft drinks & ice-cream.

✓ Eat green vegetables or salad.

Aim for 5 portions a day. These foods are high in vitamins & minerals.

✗ Cut down on red meat & saturated fats

Fats interact with the hormonal changes taking place during the menstrual cycle, & can upset your balance: they can raise prostaglandin levels & produce bloating & mood swings.

taking care of yourself

✓ Drink plenty of water - especially when exercising.

Drinking water helps to reduce fluid retention & the bloated feeling many women get. A bloated stomach is often a sign of dehydration.

✗ Avoid too much caffeine.

It can make feelings of anxiety worse & can contribute to migraines.

✗ Limit your salt intake.

It can cause fluid retention & increase feelings of bloatedness.

✗ Cut down on alcohol & smoking.

Excessive use of tobacco & alcohol is harmful to our general health & upsets the balance of vitamins & minerals in our body.

Alcohol also acts as a depressant & may increase any depressive feelings premenstrually, or make it harder to control anger or irritation.

“The diet ideas seemed to help, particularly the healthy snacks every few hours. I don’t get so anxious or irritable now.”

FOOD CRAVINGS

Many women experience food cravings premenstrually - mainly for chocolate, chips or biscuits.

Chocolate cravings may be caused by a drop in serotonin, or because you don’t have enough magnesium. Eating complex carbohydrates or foods high in magnesium may help.

Food cravings may also result from a need for comfort - particularly if you try to avoid these foods

the rest of the month. There’s no harm in eating small amounts of the food you crave - just don’t overdo it.

When women find other ways of comforting themselves - of being looked after & looking after themselves - they often find that their food cravings stop.

Food cravings can also result from feeling out of control in difficult situations - it can be easier to eat than to tackle a problem.

Write down:

- your food cravings
- what was happening at the time

Ask yourself:

- Have I eaten a meal in the last three hours?
- Am I hungry?
- Am I looking for comfort?
- Has something happened to upset me? If so, can I do anything about it?
- Can I eat a healthy snack to satisfy my cravings?
- If I eat a small amount of what I crave, will I be satisfied?

HOW OTHERS CAN HELP

Eating a healthy diet has benefits for the whole family, not just women with PMS.

It’s important to eat well.

Raise awareness by:

- Involving your partner
- Involving your children
- Involving your friends

Take the time to prepare healthy meals.

taking care of yourself

“I’ve started to ask my partner to cook dinner when I’m feeling tired premenstrually. It means I get to eat well & don’t feel burdened with all the work.”

Looking After Yourself Through Exercise

Research has shown that women who are in good physical condition generally suffer fewer & milder premenstrual symptoms. Exercise can give considerable relief.

Tension & depression can be controlled by a regular exercise program.

Regular exercise may help by:

- Reducing feelings of bloatedness
- Improving self-esteem
- Reducing depression & anxiety
- Helping you to relax
- Releasing pent up energy & tension
- Improving sleep
- Increasing energy levels & reducing fatigue
- Allowing you to do something for yourself.
- Improving blood circulation, increasing lung capacity & controlling weight.

Regular exercise means a minimum of 20 minutes of vigorous activity at least 3 times a week. But it should be a pleasure – not a pressure, & another thing to fit in to your busy life.

You could enjoy a walk in a park, join a local exercise class, go swimming or take up yoga or meditation.

“The focus on taking care of self is important. Having a reason to exercise which will be of ongoing emotional benefit, rather than just focusing on the physical side of PMS.”

Exercise can be part of your normal routine; gardening, housework, playing games with children, or walking to work.

“I know a lot more about PMS now & how normal my symptoms are & that has made me feel better about myself. It’s inspired me to get more involved in exercise again, which makes me feel good. I feel that my PMS is not as bad. In particular, I seem to have some PMS free days in my premenstrual phase which is great.”

In order to benefit from exercise it’s important to make it regular, therefore choose an exercise you enjoy & build it into your routine.

If you’re already physically fit, you may want to advance to more strenuous exercise. On the other hand, if you’re overweight or don’t want to do physical activity, you might want to start with a modest exercise program. You should get yourself into condition slowly. Brisk walking (breathing deeply & slowly as you go) is a good way for beginners to start.

HOW OTHERS CAN HELP

Participating in exercise with other people - such as your partner, children, friends or family - can benefit your physical health & your relationships.

It can also create opportunities for social interaction.

Joining a gym or exercise group provides you with a group of supportive people who can encourage you to take part, even when you don’t feel like it.

Getting your children involved in exercise will improve their health & self-confidence & enable you to have quality time together. It’s also an opportunity to gain a sense of mastery & achievement if you set exercise goals & reach them.

Partners of women with PMS can also play a helpful role. If you & your partner have time constraints due to work & family commitments, you can support

taking care of yourself

each other by sharing responsibilities & scheduling time for exercise.

Partners can also be supportive by taking on some domestic tasks, which will give you time for exercise & other forms of self-care.

“I don’t have time for me (laugh) I don’t although I’ve decided that when I start exercising & go to weight watchers, that’ll be my time. My next door neighbour came up last night & we went for an hour & a half walk & my husband came with us. That was good. It was time away from the kids, which was good & time away from the house, & time just to talk which I think is very important in a relationship & that just doesn’t happen because there’s just not enough hours in the day anymore.”

Looking After Yourself by Learning to Relax

STRESS & PMS

Many women with PMS have feelings of anxiety & stress before their periods – they are also more susceptible to stressful events at this time.

The hectic pace of our lives can make it difficult to find time to look after ourselves by relaxing & unwinding.

It’s important to have a range of coping strategies at your disposal & to set a regular time to slow down - especially before your period.

“I’m probably a little bit more lethargic & I don’t feel like up to it, I’m physically exhausted & mentally I feel exhausted also. I tend to not have the same amount of energy. I don’t tend to be as happy about things. I tend to be quite sad about things. Things can make me cry very easily.”

“There’ll be something that’ll go wrong like not screwing up the toothpaste the right way & it’s like hot water boiling & then all of a sudden you just can’t control it & you just start screaming.”

THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

Relaxation improves your overall health & wellbeing – & helps you to cope with premenstrual changes. It also gives you a sense of control.

You may not know how to relax, but your body does. This ability is always there, waiting for you to learn how to use it. Researchers call it the “relaxation response”, & it’s much more than a leisure activity or self-indulgence. The relaxation response is vital to your health & is something you can use every day to help undo the damaging physical effects of stress.

It can be hard to find time to relax. Our lives can be busy dealing with the demands of work or family, or both, & women are often expected to look after other people’s needs before their own. You may need to make some changes to your routine so that you can have some time out - to relax & enjoy yourself - & return to your daily life refreshed. Taking time out to relax can help you feel like you can cope with daily hassles & stresses without becoming anxious or overwhelmed.

If you take time out to relax, you’ll find that your premenstrual symptoms have less impact.

It is important to find some time to relax every day - not just when you are premenstrual. This is like charging up a battery – you’ll be able to benefit from the relaxation you’ve done during the rest of the month.

“I’ve learnt to take time for myself & find that I don’t get so irritated when I’m pre-menstrual.”

taking care of yourself

Some tips on how to relax

Make the most of your relaxation time & try to:

- ✓ Find time to relax at least once a day.
- ✓ Allow 15-20 minutes minimum for best results.
- ✓ Plan your relaxation for a time of day when you won't feel rushed.
- ✓ Make sure you won't be disturbed.
- ✓ Sit or lie in a comfortable position.

Don't:

- ✗ Try too hard to relax - this will make you more tense.
- ✗ Worry if your mind wanders - just bring your attention back to your breathing & let your body relax.

RELAXATION METHODS

Here are some ways to help you relax.

Some only take a few minutes & can easily be built in to your day.

Quick time-out relaxation

When you don't have much time but feel as though you're stressed or frustrated - this is a useful method. Remove yourself from the situation & take a few minutes to unwind.

1. Sit in a comfortable chair, or lie on your back on the floor.
2. Focus on controlling your breathing. When you're stressed, you either hold your breath or shallow breathe. Close your eyes & focus on taking deep, regular breaths.
3. Relax the muscles in your forehead, jaw, neck & shoulders. One at a time, tightly squeeze these muscle groups. Hold for 2 seconds, then release.

4. Let the tension flow out of each muscle group & imagine that each of them feels heavy & warm.
5. Keep your eyes closed & focus on one calming image or idea. Many people find it helpful to think of a place they associate with calmness - like a forest, lake or beach. Imagine this place as vividly as you can. Imagine the sounds you would hear if you were there, the smells, the feeling of wind or sun or water on your skin. Keep focused on this calming vision for about 30 seconds. Use this image to relax you & trigger feelings of self-soothing.

Quick physical tension release

Make it a habit to use these quick & easy stretches throughout your day - to keep your tension to a minimum.

They're easy to remember & you can do them when you're at your desk, doing things at home, or waiting in queues.

NECK ROLL

Stretch your right ear to your right shoulder, keeping your left shoulder pulled down. Slowly roll your head down so your chin is on your chest. Continue on to your left side. Do rolls from side to side. Begin with 8, build up to 16.

SHOULDER SHRUG

Draw a big circle with your shoulders, one at a time. Start with 4, build up to 8 times, going forward, then back.

PICK FRUIT

With one hand, reach up as if you were picking an apple from a tree slightly ahead & far above you. Go from one arm to the other, building up to 8 times on each side.

taking care of yourself

MASSAGE YOURSELF

Use your right hand to work on your left shoulder & left hand on your right shoulder. Work your fingers gently but firmly, beginning with your shoulder blade, moving up toward the neck & including the scalp.

SLOW BREATHING EXERCISE

This is a useful method to quickly calm yourself down when you're faced with a crisis or stressful event. You can also practice it during the day to keep yourself calmer during your premenstrual phase.

1. Hold your breath & count to 3 (do not take a deep breath in to start).
2. When you get to 3, breathe out & say the word *relax* to yourself in a calm, soothing manner.
3. Take a breath in slowly & gently through your nose to a count of 3 seconds.
4. Breathe out to a count of 3 seconds.
5. Say the word *relax* to yourself every time you breathe out.
6. Continue breathing in this way until you feel calmer.

SOME OTHER SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO RELAX

- Lie in the bath
- Go for a walk
- Read a book or a magazine
- Visit a friend for a chat
- Have a massage
- Watch a movie
- Have sex or masturbate
- Go swimming
- Listen to music
- Eat something you enjoy
- Daydream
- Sit in a favourite spot with a cup of tea/coffee
- Do some gardening

REMEMBER

- Relaxation is a skill - the more you practise the easier it will be to relax.
- Changing physical sensations may occur as you relax.
- The aim of relaxation is to lessen body tension - it doesn't mean a loss of control.
- Relaxation - makes you feel good, helps you cope with stress, & improves sleep & energy levels.

"I've found it much better, eating well, exercising - things going well, I seem able to put symptoms aside. It comes down to time out that helps."

HOW OTHERS CAN HELP

If you live with others you may need to bargain with them for some uninterrupted time when you practice your relaxation. Or you could invite them to join in & have a regular time in your household when relaxation takes place.

Partners can play a big part in supporting your relaxation practice. Think of ways that you can help each other to relax. You could use a tape or CD & do the relaxation together. Giving or receiving a shoulder & neck massage is another helpful way to reduce tension. Even if you're unable to relax together, your partner supporting you to take time to relax is important.

taking care of your needs

In this section we'll continue to look at why it's important to take care of your needs - by looking at how you communicate with others, how you can increase positive time through-out the month, & how you can negotiate space for yourself.

The issues we'll cover are:

Looking after yourself:

- By being assertive
- By doing things you enjoy
- By taking time for yourself

"Using the PMS pack made me realise that improving PMS is much in my control & possible. It never occurred to me that my attitude & a change of lifestyle could make such a difference"

Looking After Yourself by Being Assertive

Women have many roles - mother, daughter, co-worker, partner, friend. Sometimes - especially when you're premenstrual - the demands of all of these roles can be overwhelming.

Ask yourself the following questions:

Are you able to say "no" without feeling guilty or anxious?

Can you request help or information from others when you need it?

Can you tell others when their behaviour is not acceptable to you?

Can you express anger or disappointment without blaming others?

Do you feel responsible for the needs of others - but find it difficult to take the time to focus on your own needs?

"If I was tired & starting to feel quite symptomatic, then at that point I might start having feelings of resentment about coming home from work, & doing the meal preparation while everyone else runs off. Say if my husband sits down & watches television at that point & doesn't come & help, & no one even clears the table. That's when I feel that burden of care or the resentment that I really feel tired & I want to sit down, but I'm left to do this."

Taking responsibility for most of the domestic chores & not asking for help from others may create feelings of anger or resentment which erupt when you're premenstrual. This 'pressure cooker' build-up of tension leads to outbursts of emotion & then to feelings of guilt & self blame.

Talking about problems when they happen, saying what you think & being assertive can help put the lid on rising tensions.

Assertiveness is a key part of getting support, achieving a balanced life & finding time to do the things you enjoy. Being more assertive across the whole month will help to reduce your symptoms premenstrually.

"I write down what I'm angry about premenstrually, then talk about it with my partner when I'm feeling more calm. We then address the issue without having an argument."

Try to avoid raising family or relationship issues when you're premenstrual. Put them aside until later - when you feel less pressured & stronger. By keeping a lid on this build-up of tension & managing stress you're less likely to feel emotionally overloaded.

taking care of your needs

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ASSERTIVE

Women are often expected to look after other people's needs before their own - which means that we can neglect ourselves, & ignore our own needs & wants.

Being assertive isn't easy.

Without realising it, many people are either passive or aggressive - both of these can lead to stress & difficulties in relationships.

It may help to consider the following:

Passive people tend to be:

- nervous
- insecure
- timid
- unassertive
- over-cautious
- shy
- easily intimidated
- They are over-attentive to other people's needs **at the expense of their own needs.**

Aggressive people tend to be:

- nervous
- insecure
- short-tempered
- unthinking
- insensitive
- selfish
- over-powering
- They ignore other people's needs **& think only of themselves.**

It can be difficult to find a balance between being passive & being aggressive - especially when you're premenstrual. You may feel as though you see-saw between the two extremes.

It may help to try to respond in an assertive manner - this is the middle ground between being passive & being aggressive.

Assertive people tend to be:

- easy to get on with
- confident
- patient
- not easily intimidated
- calm & thoughtful
- able to express their own needs
- liked by others
- you know where you are with them
- they consider their own needs **as well as** other people's needs

We don't all fit neatly into one of these categories. We tend to be passive in some situations & aggressive in others.

But by trying to be assertive (rather than passive or aggressive), you may cope better with stressful situations and your premenstrual symptoms.

taking care of your needs

HOW TO BE ASSERTIVE

There are three simple steps. It's important to understand & practise all three steps in order. It may seem a lot to learn & a bit strange at first - but with practise it will become easier.

The basic thing you need to do is learn how to use "I" messages.

The 3 steps:

1. Actively listen to what the other person is saying. Let them know that you hear & understand them.
2. Say what **you** think or feel.
3. Say what **you would like** to happen.

Step 1

This forces you to focus on the other person - by really listening you're able to show some understanding & empathy for their situation or view point (even if you don't agree with it). You can then let them know you understand their point - but also let them know how it affects you. Be specific about the situation that is causing you difficulty.

"I understand what you are saying....."

"I realise what you feel....."

Step 2

This allows you to state your thoughts or feelings directly without sounding 'pushy' or apologising. The word 'however' is a good link between Step 1 & 2. Vary the use of 'however' with alternatives such as on the 'other hand', 'none-the-less', 'in addition', 'nevertheless', 'alternatively' etc.

Try not to use the word 'but' - it may go against your first statement.

"Never-the -less I feel that..."

"However what I think is..."

"I feel....."

Step 3

This is important - you need to say in a clear straightforward way what action or outcome you would like.

"So what I would prefer is..."

"& what I'd like to happen is...."

taking care of your needs

Putting it all together

Looking back at the quote at the beginning of this section, we could form an assertive response that sounds like the following:

“I feel really tired right now. I understand you are also tired when you get home. However, when I don’t get help from anyone at mealtimes I feel overwhelmed by the things that need to get done. So what I’d like is to agree on how we can manage things at home so that the workload is shared.”

Being assertive means calmly saying what you want or feel – you don’t need to explain or apologise for what you want.

You are just being clear.

People will find it easier to deal with you because they’ll know where they stand.

“I’ve told my sons they need to do their own ironing from now on. I bought them an ironing board & they’ve been quite happy to do it. It gives me more time to do other things.”

HOW OTHERS CAN HELP

You can help your family, friends or partner understand the changes you’re making in your communication style – talk to them about the differences between being assertive, passive & aggressive. When other people know about your plans they’re more likely to understand & support your needs.

If you have a partner you can work together to build assertiveness skills so that you both express your needs more clearly - reducing misunderstandings that might arise between you.

Your partner can also help you to be assertive with others.

For example:

if you have children & they’re misbehaving - your partner can back you up in dealing with them, rather than leaving it to you.

Or

your partner can help you to say “no” to other demands - such as social engagements that aren’t really necessary, by not making arrangements without asking you, & by backing you up when you do say “no”.

COMMUNICATING YOUR NEEDS FOR PHYSICAL INTIMACY

Women with PMS have different needs for physical contact & intimacy with their partners.

For example:

Some women say that they don’t want their partner to touch them intimately when they’re premenstrual. They find sexual intimacy very difficult but don’t know how to say “no” without making their partner feel rejected.

Some women say they feel more sexual when they’re premenstrual but don’t know how to ask their partner for sexual contact when they’ve been irritable for the last few days.

Rather than leaving it to them to figure it out, your relationship will benefit from being clear about your needs.

“I feel sorry for him actually. Sometimes I can see that he just wants to make love or whatever & I’m just not in the mood. I’m just always too tired & I just don’t want to & I mean he tries & tries & tries & I just keep saying no, no, no - I’ve had enough.”

Partners often don’t know where they stand when their attempts at physical closeness are rejected.

Sometimes women will want to be held - but that may only last briefly & then they feel like pushing their partner away. Other times women say that if their partner doesn’t hold them they feel like bursting into tears. Sometimes, if their partner does touch them, they want to lash out because their partner doesn’t seem to understand how sore their breasts are. These behaviours can lead your partner to take things personally & feel frustrated, rejected & angry.

taking care of your needs

We've talked about when I'm cranky or depressed & I've told him a million times that all I need you to do is just hug me but he still doesn't do it. He's very defensive & he thinks it's all about him when most of the time I'm angry at myself more than anyone else."

Explaining your needs for intimacy & the effects of PMS on your moods is best done at a time when you're not premenstrual.

This will allow you to get some distance from PMS & help you be more objective about its effects. You're also less likely to feel emotionally vulnerable or to blame yourself.

"I've asked my husband to give me a hug more often. It's not an issue when I don't have PMS - but I told him I need more in that time."

If you use assertive communication to talk about your needs around these real & valid concerns, you're more likely to increase the emotional intimacy in your relationship.

taking care of your needs

ASSERTIVENESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

Practice some self-assessment for a month & see whether there were occasions when you weren't happy about something but you didn't say anything about it.

Finding answers for the following questions will help you evaluate your assertiveness.

“For five days it’s a no-go zone I don’t enjoy even being desired. Initially it was really hard because I would just go “No. Just don’t want to” & my partner would get quite hurt by it. But now we can talk about it & there’s an understanding that it’s not a personal thing. It’s just the body isn’t feeling those things that it normally does. It’s not about personal rejection.”

- Over the last month were there times when you didn't ask for help or express your needs about something? In what situation(s) did this occur?

- What happened as a result? How did you react? How did others in the situation react?

- What was your emotional response to the way things turned out? Did you keep your feelings to yourself & end up feeling angry or resentful? Or did you explode angrily & feel bad about it afterwards?

- What could you have said in an assertive way that would have let you express your feelings or wishes?

Looking After Yourself by Doing Things You Enjoy

INCREASING PLEASURABLE ACTIVITIES

Do you spend all of your time working or completing chores & tasks that you feel have to be done?

If you do – you may find you have less time to do things that you enjoy.

This may be especially true if you're feeling tired, depressed or anxious before your period.

Putting some pleasure back into your life will improve your mood & help you to cope better.

“That’s how bad it gets & everything has to be in its place & everything has to be perfect. I mean I work full-time; I work 38 hours plus a week. I do that in four days as well as running a house as well as looking after the kids even though my kids are 21, 19 & 16. You’ve still got all the emotional issues that go along with it as well, & sometimes it just gets too overwhelming.”

taking care of your needs

List of enjoyable activities

To start you thinking about what you enjoy, try the following exercise.

Make a list of 10 things you enjoy doing most. It may include: walking, seeing friends, lying in the bath, cooking or eating, reading, window-shopping, movies, sport, yoga, art, education, travel, watching a favourite TV programme etc. They can be activities on your own or with other people.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Scheduling activities

It may help to plan pleasant activities & fit them into your daily routine, like making a date with yourself in your diary. Choose 5 of your favourite activities that you plan to do this week. List which days you plan to do them.

Monday _____

Tuesday _____

Wednesday _____

Thursday _____

Friday _____

Saturday _____

Sunday _____

taking care of your needs

Try to do at least 1 thing for yourself every day.

If this is difficult, ask yourself 'why'?

- Are there too many demands from others?
- Do I not know what I enjoy doing?
- Do I feel guilty if I do things for myself?
- Am I having trouble being assertive & getting my needs met?

These are some of the reasons women give for finding it hard to take time for themselves.

Doing things you enjoy will reduce your premenstrual symptoms, & may improve your relationships, as you will be more relaxed.

So don't feel guilty!

“I realised I didn't have any time in my day for myself. Now I get up 30 minutes earlier & go for a walk in the morning, & make sure I have coffee with a friend at least once a week.”

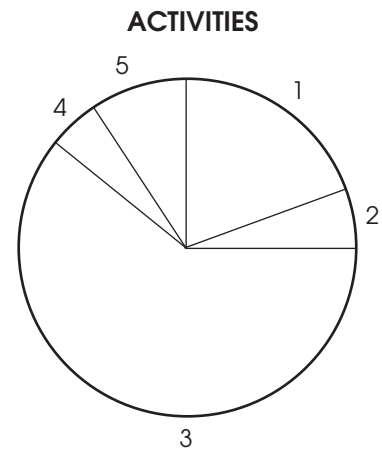
taking care of your needs

Some people also find it helpful to look at how they balance their activities over an average day.

On the chart below jot down how much time, in an average day, you spend doing different activities (use any headings you like).

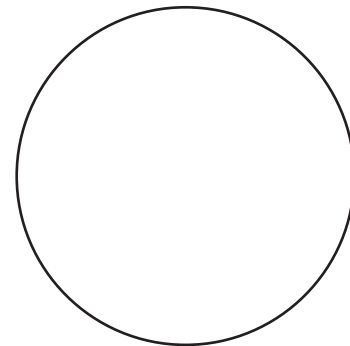
For example:

1. Housework & looking after family
2. Watching TV
3. Paid work
4. Exercise/Recreation
5. Seeing friends



Now draw another one of how you'd like to balance your lifestyle.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____



taking care of your needs

In order to achieve your ideal plan you may need to plan your time differently.

this can be done by:

1. Set up priorities - sort out what's important to you. It might help to list your activities into high priority & low priority.
2. What would you like to do that you're not doing? Can you create more time to do this? Which tasks could you stop doing to allow time to do the things you enjoy?
3. Can you ask for help with some of your responsibilities?

These are some examples of what other women have done:

- I'll hand over more at work, so that I can have a proper lunch break.
- I'll get the kids to help with the housework so I have more time for taking them out.
- I'll stop watching TV 2 nights a week so I can go swimming.
- I'll do a bulk shop once a month so I have more time to visit friends in the week.

4. Make a list of all the things you have to do each day. Ask yourself if it's possible to do them all or if you're trying to do too much & your expectations are unrealistic. Put them in order. Leave out things that aren't important, or can't be done today. Put them on the list for tomorrow, or for another day. Make sure there's some time for you each day.

5. Each day, plan a to-do list for tomorrow that will help you achieve a better balance.

Keep in mind your goals & priorities.

ACTIVITIES

MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

It'll help if you do this every day - but particularly when you're premenstrual. Do it before you go to bed at night, so that you wake up with a clear plan, & don't feel overwhelmed. If you forget, do it first thing in the morning.

Taking care of yourself by planning time for yourself planning time for your other responsibilities will help you feel more in charge of each day & reduce the load when you're premenstrual.

taking care of your needs

HOW OTHERS CAN HELP

If you live with family or friends you could talk about changing some of the household responsibilities – so that you have time to do the things you want to.

“I’ve stopped worrying about everything in the house being perfect all the time, so that I can make some time for myself. Nobody else notices the difference, so I don’t know what I was worrying about.”

If you have a partner you could work on setting up activities that you could do together - at the start of the week. This will help you balance & share the responsibilities around work & home life. Planning & doing things together that you both enjoy will also increase the intimacy in your relationship.

Sometimes couples disagree over which tasks should take priority. By talking things over with your partner you may be able to get - another perspective on things or shift some tasks to another day - giving yourself more breathing space when you’re premenstrual.

“All I ever do is clean & cook & look after the kids & all I ever do is run around & clean up after everybody. & I think, like I said for 3 weeks of the month it doesn’t bother me cos I’m sure I’m doing it every week but it just seems the week before my period I, I just don’t cope with that so well. I don’t want to do that anymore [laughs] I want someone to look after me”.

Looking After Yourself by Taking Time to be Alone

One of the ways that many women cope with premenstrual changes is to have time to themselves, away from the demands of work, home or family.

Taking time out lets you renew, reflect, or refresh yourself, & to take care of you. Although many women admit that time alone is something they would find helpful, they also say it’s a rare thing.

“To have the space to just be able to withdraw for a bit, & disengage from the family activities & not be pursued in that moment. If I could go & lie down & do that without someone coming in & going ‘have you seen this’, or ‘do you know where this is’. I resent that intrusion because even if I do try an act of self-care, they come & intrude on that space.”

Everyone has different needs for how much quiet time they need.

Having that time to yourself however, is one of the best things you can do for yourself.

You may choose to spend that time lying down, reading, writing, meditating, walking, or listening to music.

Whether you choose to do something - or - nothing at all is not important - it’s making the choice to give yourself time.

“I get really introverted during that time. I don’t want to see anyone, I don’t want to socialise, I don’t want to be near anyone. Noise really annoys me. People annoy me. Men annoy me! [laughs] Everything annoys me!”

HOW OTHERS CAN HELP

Many women say that they feel like they want to withdraw from others & find it helpful to take time to themselves to deal with feeling premenstrual.

Let your partner, friends or family know when you need time alone.

Partners can help by planning with you how you can get your needs met.

For women with children - this could involve your partner keeping them busy to let you have some time alone.

For a single mother - it may involve arranging activities for children who are old enough to occupy themselves for a while, or asking a friend to baby-sit & offering to repay the favour.

taking care of your needs

Women who live with family members or flatmates & need space to themselves could benefit from explaining this to others - so that when the time comes, you can withdraw without others seeing this behaviour in a negative way.

“I just tell people I want to be on my own, that I don’t want to talk, or watch TV, or anything. My husband used to think I was rejecting him, but now he understands that it isn’t about him, so he doesn’t mind, & I don’t feel guilty about being on my own.”

Discuss your needs for quiet time with others - use assertive messages to communicate your need for time alone. Using assertive communication will help you say what you need without ignoring the needs of others.

Think through what you need to say using the ‘I’ message steps, then role play what you’re going to do & say.

Try different versions & get feedback. Let others know that you value their support in helping you to find time alone. Test your skills in using ‘I’ messages such as the example below & note what happens.

“I understand that you need to talk to me about our plans for the weekend. Right now I’m feeling exhausted & I’d like to close my eyes for 10 minutes to refresh. So I’d prefer if we get together after that.”

“Sometimes if I’m feeling really bad I’ll prepare him. I’ll come home & say ‘I’ve just been really irritable all day so if there’s something that you want to talk about probably don’t bother me just now, let me relax a bit, yeah?’ & he’ll be like ‘yeah okay, maybe come & get me when you’re ready.’”

taking care of your relationships

Relationships are a key aspect of many women's premenstrual experience - with family, friends & work colleagues being a focus of mood change, a source of support, & sometimes a source of annoyance or frustration.

In this section we'll look at - how a greater understanding of PMS within your relationship can help to reduce your premenstrual symptoms & increase your coping.

The issues we'll cover are:

- Relationships & PMS
- Emotional reactivity
- Ways to reduce emotional overload

Relationships & PMS

Many women say that when they're premenstrual their relationships are affected.

This can be in terms of:

- feeling intolerant towards friends & family
- overwhelming anger, frustration or annoyance
 - with partner, children or others
- irritation with work colleagues
- finding the demands of other people overwhelming
- arguments & fights
- not wanting to see or talk to anyone, wanting to be alone
- feeling like you're someone you don't like, feeling not yourself
- being very sensitive to what others say
- feeling insecure in your relationships or friendships
- being uncomfortable in your body around others who seem slim & happy
- thinking that others are finding you a pain in the neck
- feeling slowed down & unable to keep up with social/family interactions

"I have a very short fuse & lose my temper very easily with my husband & children which can have a domino effect of upsetting the whole family."

"I felt unsure that my partner really cared about me or loved me."

Have you ever felt like your family members or friends are affected by your premenstrual mood changes? Sometimes you might feel that you're behaving unfairly - but are unable to control your emotional reactions. Then you feel guilty because your loved ones take your mood personally, as if they're to blame.

"I'm learning to recognise my bursting point & am able to stop myself fairly quickly after take off. I'm greatly distressed by the way I can speak & act towards my husband & children at times. It is improving, due to determination & will on my part."

Many women with PMS say their relationships suffer when they're premenstrual. Knowing that you're not the only one whose relationships are affected when you're premenstrual might offer some comfort - but it's probably more helpful to think about what can be done to help family & other relationships run more smoothly.

taking care of your relationships

Mostly, this will involve calming & soothing yourself, communicating your needs, & planning ahead.

It's also helpful to understand what's going on in your body (& in the bodies of others) when you experience strong, seemingly uncontrollable emotions. When you can recognise the signs you'll be better able to reduce the chances of this happening.

"More understanding of the emotional changes enables me to cope with the depressing/angry feelings heaps better."

Emotional Reactivity

Many women describe experiencing a sudden explosion of uncontrollable anger when they're premenstrual. This is called emotional reactivity. Changes in hormones & neurotransmitters during this part of the cycle make many women more open to external stresses, & more reactive in the face of minor irritations, or more serious issues in relation to others.

"I don't have any patience & I'll just bite their head off. I can't tolerate anything that doesn't go my way. If there is any inconvenience in any situation I can't handle it."

When you suddenly explode or react in a negative way with others, often in an uncontrolled way – you're already overwhelmed.

The key is to try to recognise the signs of emotional reactivity earlier – so you can better manage your feelings & to take time to calm & soothe yourself.

"I get nasty with my family, angry & I think violent thoughts of slapping my children's faces, not just smacking on the bottom but almost "flogging" (which I don't do)!"

Feeling emotionally overwhelmed

Have you noticed any of the following signs during interactions with your partner, family members, friends or colleagues when you're premenstrual?

- Your discussions get too heated.
- You have a hard time calming down.
- You usually say something that you later regret.
- You get too upset.
- Your heart feels like it's pounding in your chest.
- You yell when there's no need to.
- Others try to keep their distance from you.
- You feel overwhelmed by your strong feelings.
- You're unable to think straight.
- There's often no stopping your temper.
- Others want to get away from you during heated discussions.
- Small things get blown out of proportion.

"I feel like there's something happening in my head, like not dizzy but my head is just buzzing & I just can't stop it. I keep going on & everything feels like it's the end of the world. Say we've started to talk about something, & then I might get upset & walk home & then walk back & continue screaming because I forgot to say something."

PHYSICAL SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL REACTIVITY

Being emotionally overwhelmed also has physical effects on your body. Signs of emotional reactivity in your body include - a pounding heart, sweating, trembling or shaking, & holding your breath or breathing shallowly. These are physical indicators of the "fight or flight response" being triggered by hormonal changes (such as the release of

taking care of your relationships

adrenalin). Your heart rate speeds up & your blood pressure rises. Your body is preparing for actions needed for survival, such as defending (fighting) or running away (fleeing).

“It’s usually just one big explosion that happens three or four times in those two weeks. I get this hot feeling sometimes too where I know just before I explode. It’s like I get so angry I can feel my blood pressure is going up.”

It’s important to understand that if your fight or flight response is set off & your interaction with another person is over-heated, they may also experience the same physical effects. This will make them more reactive to anything that’s going on around them, including you. All of these changes in our bodies happen almost instantly & automatically.

Effects of emotional reactivity on thinking & behaviour

If you experience a number of physical stress responses when you’re dealing with others you’re unlikely to resolve issues. When your heart rate speeds up, your ability to deal with information is affected & it becomes harder to pay attention & focus on what someone else is saying. This means that you might find it difficult to find solutions to problems & will end up responding in a more hasty way - linked to the fight or flight response.

This will lead to unhelpful behaviours when you’re trying to solve issues – behaviours such as fighting (criticising, sneering or being defensive toward others), or fleeing (ignoring, avoiding, or disengaging from others). These behaviours tend to make problems worse & distance you from others.

“I get upset, & everything I’m annoyed about comes out in a big rush, then my partner gets angry, & it ends up with one of us walking off. It happens every month.”

Strategies to reduce emotional overload

To help reduce emotional overload - include relaxation practices in your daily schedule. Refer to the “Taking Care of Yourself” section on learning how to relax for instructions. It’s very helpful to include regular mini-sessions of self-soothing across the day, especially when you’re feeling more vulnerable to stress. One way is to incorporate 5 minutes of slow breathing into every hour.

“When I take time out to relax I find that I don’t get overwhelmed, & feel much more in control of my emotions. I don’t lose it any more when I’m premenstrual.”

HOW PARTNERS CAN HELP

Your partner can also play a significant role in helping to reduce emotional overload.

Firstly, by talking together about how the body reacts under stress, your partner will gain an understanding of the physical effects of emotional reactivity – allowing them to develop insight into how this occurs & why is may be difficult for you to control your emotions when you’re premenstrual.

Your partner can also take steps to prevent the situation from getting out of hand: by not taking heated remarks personally; by learning to recognise when their own body is becoming reactive; & by managing their own reactivity with self-soothing strategies.

“If I’m getting angry, I try to stop it escalating, & if I end up losing it I say sorry, or walk out of the room until I calm down.”

You could also decide on a signal that you can give each other if you notice that either of you are becoming overwhelmed.

This signal says “Stop, I’m feeling overwhelmed. Let’s take a break for a while.”

taking care of your relationships

In the middle of conflict it's difficult to think clearly & to communicate your needs - so use something that you both understand & respect each other's needs to calm down.

During the break do some self-soothing & give yourself about 20 minutes before getting back to the topic under discussion. You'll find that your ability to reach a solution is much greater if you take time to calm down.

If you feel the need to withdraw, or feel oversensitive & depressed - partners can also play an important role.

If you have children, your partner can help - by taking them to the park or engaging them in things at home to allow you to be alone without feeling that you're neglecting your family.

If you're in a relationship but don't have children, your partner can help by being accepting & understanding of your need to be alone without seeing your request as a rejection of them.

"When I come home from work wound up, because I've got PMS, my kids encourage me to go for a walk to let off steam & have some time on my own. I can keep calm then."

LETTING OTHERS KNOW HOW YOU FEEL

Being able to let others know how you feel when you're premenstrual is important in gaining support & understanding.

Your friends, partner & family can help you to deal with premenstrual symptoms by being understanding & sympathetic.

If you explain to others how you feel, they can also help to reduce the extra stresses that can occur. If you live with others this is a good time to involve them - by letting them know how you feel & asking for help.

Some suggestions for how your family or friends can help are:

- Talk openly about the way you feel - so that everyone understands what you're feeling.

- Others can help with preparing balanced meals.
- Household chores can be divided amongst everyone in order to reduce stress, & to stop you feeling as if you have to do everything.
- Your need to relax & to be alone should be respected.
- If you want to be held or cuddled, ask for this. If you don't want to be touched, say so.
- A sympathetic ear is often helpful - ask if you can talk about how you feel if you think this will help.

If you do not have understanding family members or friends around you, keeping a journal can be a helpful way of expressing your feelings.

Being clear about the things that are upsetting you when you're premenstrual is helpful so that you can be specific in planning what extra help you'll need.

"It's taken many years for me to admit that (I need support), & for me then to say to, to my husband, you know, 'It's the time of the month'. I need space. & that's been very difficult. But I've now done it."

KEEPING A 'BAD DAY' REPORT

See the example at the end of this section.

This can help you to see what else was happening when you were premenstrual & lets you know that other things besides PMS contribute to feeling overwhelmed or frustrated.

It may show where you need to take action on certain issues to ease difficulties in your life. Look at your records when you're feeling better, & see how you feel about them now.

- Is there a problem you need to deal with?
- Are you bottling things up for most of the month, causing a build up of pressure that comes out when you are premenstrual?

taking care of your relationships

- If so, you can reduce this tension by talking about the issues that concern you, or asking for help.

If you look back at your 'bad day' report & think that the things that were upsetting you seem silly or unimportant, you may feel that you can't raise these issues with family members or friends.

"When I've got PMS I'd say 'Nobody does anything round this house!' & slam & stomp around a bit. Or I'll go on strike! [laughs] Where I won't cook."

Many women say that the issues that were upsetting when they were premenstrual sound stupid e.g. anger over a dish cloth left in the sink. Often their strong feelings about these seemingly unimportant issues go away & they can't believe they were so upset.

At the time however, you may have been upset because it felt like these 'minor' wrongdoings were the last straw, or meant that others don't appreciate everything you're doing for them. Or maybe you felt that others do not consider your feelings or are completely unaware of them.

Don't ignore the meanings that lie behind your reactions & distress.

Keeping a bad day report can help you discover the meaning behind these issues & you can then plan to communicate assertively with family & friends to let them know what the real issues are.

"Earlier in the week my daughter hadn't put her cereal bowl in the dishwasher again. & I just screamed at her to come downstairs, but once she got down I just went, 'You haven't done this! You haven't done that! Just look at this! Look at that!'"

WORK OUT SOLUTIONS TO YOUR PROBLEMS

If you bottle things up, they tend to come out when you're feeling vulnerable or overwhelmed – the premenstrual phase of the cycle for many women. Rather than bottling things up & keeping problems to yourself, talk to someone & work out some solutions.

"There's a few days of the month where I feel I'm not myself, or there's you know, anger or tension that builds up & then I release it at that point. & others around me suffer the consequences!"

It's best to talk to others about situations in the home that you think are a problem - when you're feeling calm. This will mean there will be less 'fuel' for your anger & you're less likely to over-react. Think of all the possible ways to solve the problem & the advantages & disadvantages of each. Talk this over with others so that you share the responsibility of solving problems at home. Then choose the best option & plan to put it into action.

"There's things in our relationship that I focus on which I feel aren't good... I used to want to face it now, whether it's, you know, him having breakfast in the morning or just about to go, I want to do it now, & that's not like me. (Since using the pack) I've learnt to wait until I'm less angry, then talk about things calmly."

taking care of your relationships

Bad day report

Following is a form you can use to write down things that happen on a day when you're premenstrual.

It's best to make some notes about what happened as soon as possible, rather than leaving it a few days. Reflecting on these reports will show you if you're thinking negatively about yourself or blaming yourself, & may highlight other issues that have contributed to your emotional reaction or feelings. Later, you can use these records to talk things over with your partner, family or friends.

It's a helpful way to track patterns of behaviour & interactions that may be at the heart of the problem & can lead to helpful discussion & problem-solving.

"Every morning is particularly bad in our house when I'm pre-menstrual. I've got three children. The youngest is five, seven & almost ten. Getting the children ready for school is just a nightmare. It's always quite difficult, but normally, I'll be saying to them, 'Come on', you know, 'Get dressed. Get washed. Clean your teeth. Get your stuff together.' You know, 'It's nearly time to go'. When I'm pre-menstrual within minutes of the children getting up for school, I'm screaming at them & if they don't do what I'm asking them to do I mean it, the whole thing just escalates. It will get worse & worse & worse."

taking care of your relationships

“BAD DAY” REPORT

Date: _____ Day of Menstrual Cycle: _____

What happened – who, what, where

How did you react – feelings, behaviours, thoughts.

Foods eaten (Also note any long stretches without eating):

Coffee/tea & alcohol intake: _____

Current stressors:

taking care of your relationships

Review of the day several days later

How does the day look in retrospect?

Are there issues which may still be important?

What could you do to tackle any problems or causes of difficulty?

What have you discovered?

taking care of your thinking

Our thoughts are closely linked to how we feel - & we can change how we feel by changing our thoughts.

In this section we'll look at ways of understanding & coping with PMSD - through focusing on our thought processes.

The issues we'll cover are:

- The link between thoughts, feelings & behaviour
- How to break the habit of negative thinking
- Developing helpful ways of thinking
- Challenging unhelpful thinking

The link between thoughts, feelings & behaviour

Our bodies & our minds are one system - thoughts, feelings & behaviours are all related to each other & influence each other.

- If our bodies are relaxed & healthy - we'll feel better, have a more positive outlook, & relate better with the world.
- If we're happy & thinking positively - we experience less physical stress & we can cope with bodily changes & life stressors better.

On the down side, the link between our body & mind can result in a circle of upsetting thoughts, feelings & behaviours - particularly in the premenstrual phase of the cycle.

"I tend to focus on the bad things like, leaving the ensuite door open, or leaving something on the floor, or not doing something. That immediately sets me off on thinking negatively about him. I listen to my thoughts, my self-talk & it's all negative. I go over things that we've had arguments about or that have been problems with us & I just start thinking about those & get really worked up, where I'm just cranky when he gets home & I feel it's all justified in my head."

The concerns expressed in this divide may be completely understandable & give good reason to be annoyed - but it's the way that these concerns become connected, overwhelming, & all-encompassing that is the problem.

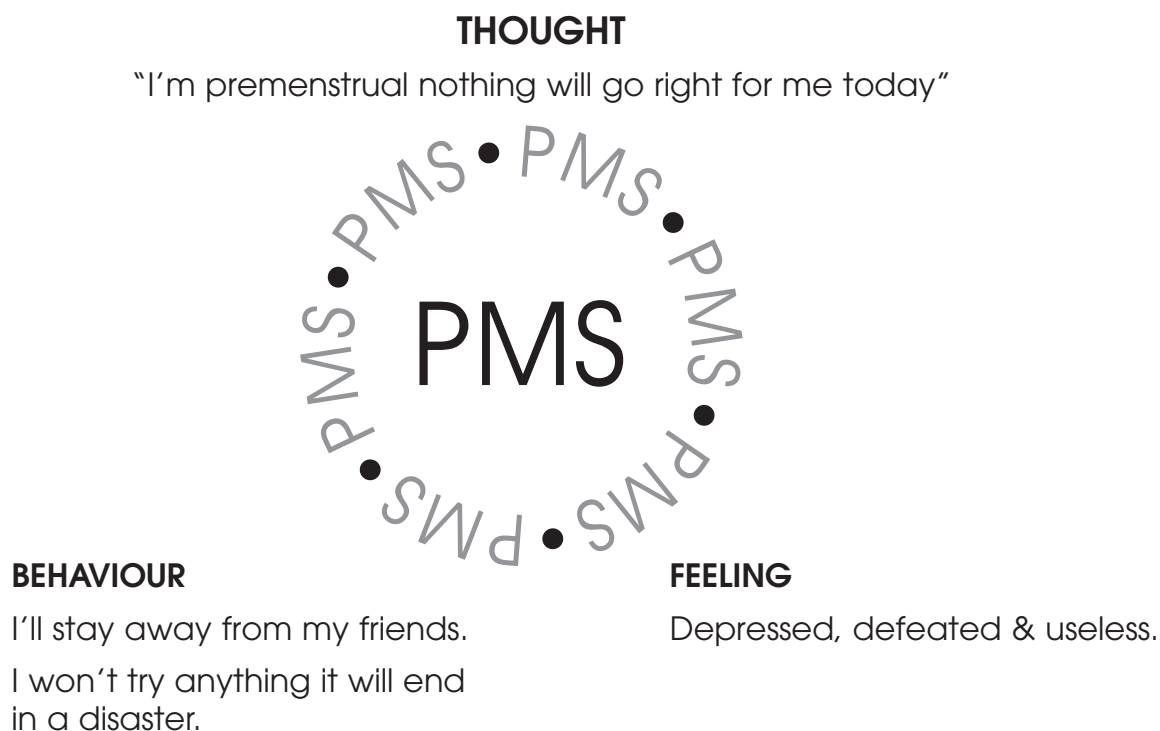
When our thoughts become focused on negative experiences - our feelings & behaviours tend to follow.

For example, a woman wakes up in the morning feeling bloated. Her first thought is, "I'm premenstrual nothing will go right for me today".

- This thought affects her mood - leaving her feeling depressed.
- Her depressed mood affects how she behaves - she decides not to meet her friends for lunch because she can't face the journey on public transport.
- This makes her feel more depressed - it proves her idea that being premenstrual means the day will be a disaster.

taking care of your thinking

The following diagram shows how these thoughts, feelings & behaviours are all related - & can go round & round in a circle.



How to break the habit of negative thinking

This isn't all bad news.

We can make this cycle work for us - by challenging the negative thoughts - which will change our feelings - & lead to different behaviours.

It may help to question your thoughts;

- are they a fair reflection of the situation?
- How would I feel at another time if I wasn't premenstrual?

We're all prone to ways of thinking which can alter our view of the situation. You may be doing one or more of the following:

EXAGGERATING

Magnifying all your bad points or weaknesses. For example, breaking a glass when you're premenstrual & concluding that you're a clumsy, stupid person. It may have just slipped out of your hand.

CATASTROPHISING

Thinking that everything will end in complete disaster when something minor goes wrong. For example, realising that a job interview is during your premenstrual phase & concluding that the interview will be a complete disaster, you'll never be offered the job, your career will be ruined & you'll never achieve anything in life. You may actually do well in the interview.

OVERGENERALISING

Expecting everything to be dreadful all the time because of one bad experience. For example, deciding that no one likes you & no one would ever want to be your friend because you argued with a friend last night on the phone. One argument doesn't end a friendship, & one difficult encounter doesn't mean everyone dislikes you.

taking care of your thinking

MIND READING

Telling yourself that you know what someone is thinking or saying about you when you haven't heard them actually say anything. This type of thinking usually has a negative focus such as, "I know what he's saying about me to his mates – she's impossible to live with."

FORTUNE TELLING OR JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

Predicting that something bad will happen. For example, telling yourself that your partner will be home late tonight just when you're feeling exhausted & really need help with the dinner. The reality may be that your partner has been home late once this week but is unlikely to need to stay late again.

IGNORING THE POSITIVE

Overlooking your good points & focusing on the negative aspects of yourself or your life. For example, ignoring the fact that you managed to look after your children all day, go shopping & prepare three meals, & instead criticise yourself for the pile of ironing you haven't managed to do.

EMOTIONAL REASONING

When you feel bad & conclude that the situation is hopeless or you are in some way flawed. It's a case of mistaking feelings for facts. Just because you feel incompetent, doesn't make it true.

ALL OR NOTHING

Taking a view of the world that is black or white – which doesn't allow you to find the middle ground. For example, if I don't do any exercise this week, I'm a slob. It would be more helpful to think: I'll do as much as I can – it doesn't matter if I miss a day (or a week) – I'll just take it up again tomorrow.

SHOULD, MUSTS & OUGHTS

These words sound like "rules" to live by which are unreasonable or unrealistic. For example, "I should do all the housework today"; "I ought to make every effort to look young & attractive"; "I must never get angry with my children"; "I should be going for promotion at work"; "I should be able to solve the problems in my relationship". Ask yourself whose rules these are & where have they come from? Do they work for you? Do they help you? As much as possible remove uncalled-for demands & get rid of the 'shoulds' in your self-talk.

DEVELOPING MORE HELPFUL WAYS OF THINKING

Our culture tells us that women should be able to handle all the different roles that we have – mother, daughter, friend, wife, partner, colleague etc. – & this can reinforce our negative thinking. Many women expect to be calm, in control, able to cope & be happy at all times. It's impossible – for anyone. Premenstrually, it's even harder, as the stresses & strains of life can feel overwhelming.

"I am a very caring person in that I do go out of my way to help people & I'd like to think that I am a good mother. Well I know I'm a good mother. I've got three very well behaved, balanced children. I've got their welfare at heart. Um, I just want what's best for my children, my husband, all my family. & I sort of look sometimes at myself when I'm pre-menstrual & I think that I don't like myself. I don't like what I've become."

To break the cycle of unhelpful thinking & judging yourself you'll need to be aware of your self-talk – the things you say to yourself all day long. You might need to practice being aware of what goes through your mind, particularly when you're facing a stressful situation.

What do you tell yourself about the situation, your ability to cope, yours or someone else's contribution to the problem, how it will be in the future?

taking care of your thinking

Our thinking is often just a habit & thoughts pass through our minds without us noticing them. We call these automatic thoughts. These kinds of thoughts aren't a problem when we're feeling ok & coping with our day-to-day life. They can be unhelpful though, in situations we find stressful or challenging.

"I just felt like they don't really like me, they don't really want to talk to me. I'm talking a load of rubbish every time I talk to them. & I wasn't at all. & I didn't see any of that until the next day, & I said to my partner, I think nobody was talking to me because I had such a negative feeling about everybody."

Our inner voice is often critical. Imagine someone whispering some of the following comments in your ear all day:

- ***you're not good enough***
- ***nobody likes you***
- ***you're a loser***
- ***you're kidding yourself if you think you can do that!***
- ***what did you do that for stupid?***

If you listened to comments like this often enough you'd believe them & your behaviours would mirror your beliefs. You'd find it more & more difficult to tackle difficult situations or be positive about your life because you'd believe you weren't capable or good enough.

Write down your thoughts - so that you can be aware of the messages & instructions you're giving yourself all day long.

"I started to keep a diary of what I was thinking when I was premenstrual, & I realized that I was feeling over-reacting to everything because I felt vulnerable."

Understanding your thoughts & the situations that trigger them, let's you develop ways to stop this negative thinking that leads you to behave in ways you don't like.

Writing things down gives you clear evidence of the links between things that happen & how you feel & react. You'll become more familiar with your particular ways of responding & more skillful at making changes to your thinking that will lead to better results.

"I mean what came home to me is obviously that my lifestyle does aggravate it, a lot, and that stress does you know play a role certainly in aggravating premenstrual symptoms and negative thoughts about myself... if I could have stayed at home today, in bed, by myself, you know under the doona, I would have been a happy girl."

When you put something down on paper (in black & white) it also gives you a little space from your negative thoughts. This space is helpful because automatic thoughts are very convincing. They're our own voice telling us about ourselves & we don't usually stop to question these thoughts. They've also been around a long time - they usually start in childhood or when we're teenagers. Getting some distance from them helps us to take a more neutral view & gives us the opportunity to look at what we're thinking more critically.

You can follow the method outlined in the "Example Thought Record" at the end of this section to record your thoughts & feelings. Or, make a record in a small notebook you can carry with you. It's best to do this as soon as possible after the situation has happened - because you'll be more accurate when it's fresh in your mind.

Once you become familiar with the types of unhelpful thoughts you're prone to - you can begin to form more helpful options.

It may help to ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I been fair on myself? Have I looked at the whole situation?

taking care of your thinking

- Am I exaggerating how bad it is & blowing things out of proportion?
- Am I predicting something bad will happen when I have no evidence that it will?
- Am I thinking only in black & white terms? Is there some middle ground or compromise?
- Have I jumped to a conclusion without having checked on the facts?
- How would I view a friend in a similar situation?
- What's the worst thing that could happen? How would I cope?
- Is there a more positive way of looking at this situation?
- Am I trying to follow unreasonable rules?
- Is the way I'm talking to myself helping me get through this difficulty?

Once you have honestly looked at the answers to some of these questions you can create a different way of looking at the situation - one that's more helpful.

taking care of your thinking

Let's go over the previous example & think about ways in which the woman could change her self-talk to stop her unhelpful circle of thoughts, feelings & behaviours.

The bold shows alternative thoughts & actions that may help the woman to cope better premenstrually & feel less depressed.

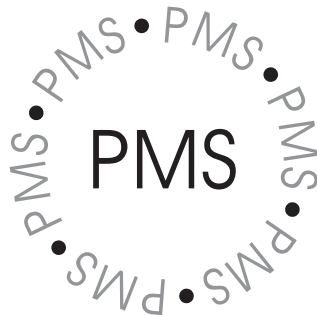
THOUGHT

BEFORE: • "I'm premenstrual nothing will go right for me today"

AFTER: • "I'm premenstrual & I think everything is going to be a disaster but if I take things slowly & don't try to do too much maybe I can cope"

• "I've got a lot on today, so it isn't surprising it feels overwhelming"

• "I'm premenstrual, so I'm more sensitive to stress: I will go easy on myself"



BEHAVIOUR

BEFORE: • I'll stay away from my friends. I won't try anything it will end in a disaster.

AFTER: • I can meet my friends if I leave plenty of time for the journey.

- If I'm late or I'm not feeling too good I can let my friends know how I feel & they will understand.
- I would be sympathetic if they said they felt depressed before their period.
- If I really need to, I can see people another day.

FEELING

BEFORE: • Depressed, defeated & useless.

AFTER: • Less depressed. less useless. More positive, more in control.

- Not feeling a failure.
- Calm, looked after, supported.

taking care of your thinking

After you've practiced tuning in to your self-talk & challenging your thoughts you'll find that you develop healthier thinking habits.

You'll notice whether your thoughts are helpful or unhelpful a lot faster & you'll become better at arguing back & coming up with a healthier point of view.

This has obvious benefits across all areas of your life, not just when you're feeling premenstrual

"I've learned to brush things off, so that's more comfortable, also when I get upset, little things can turn into huge things, something small may upset me, then I'll try to find a reason why I'm feeling so sad & crying & that escalates into everything else in my life that's made me sad, whereas now I don't get these violent crying fits, I mean they really were like screaming pain you know, & just I just don't get that any more I might be a little bit sad but that's it."

HOW OTHERS CAN HELP

If you're in a relationship it's useful to talk to your partner about the ways you're challenging your thinking - that way they'll understand the process you're using when you suddenly seem to change your mind about something.

If you think that your partner sometimes backs up your negative self beliefs - you'll also be able to explain to them how that affects you.

Your partner can also help you to challenge certain beliefs you have about yourself that are unhelpful.

For example, many women feel uncomfortable in their body when they're premenstrual & feel unattractive & unlovable. Your partner can help you challenge these beliefs by being on the look-out for negative self-talk (about your looks & your body). When they notice you saying such things they can give you a gentle reminder to change these unhelpful views.

"It was so bad & I mean my boyfriend said well you're pre-menstrual, & I'd say but I'm not pre-menstrual, this is real I'm feeling it you know, I'm feeling this pain & I'm feeling this unhappy that I don't want to live, you know all this type of thing, & it made me angry that he used to say that & blame it on PMS, because I wouldn't recognise it as real & so now that I know that people are recognising it & doing something about it, its easier for me to say, you know, this is something that happens, it doesn't mean you are always going to feel like this, its going to go away."

"I always hate my body when I'm premenstrual. I feel fat & ugly. My partner tells me I look the same, & that she loves me the way I am, which stops me spiraling into despair & self-hatred."

Your partner may even benefit from putting these strategies into practice themselves & together you can share your experiences, challenges & successes.

taking care of your thinking

EXAMPLE THOUGHT RECORD

<p>Situation – what was happening?</p> <p>Who, what, when, where.</p> <p>Were you premenstrual?</p>	<p>What were you thinking?</p> <p>What did you say to yourself?</p> <p>What went through your mind?</p>	<p>What feelings did you notice?</p> <p>What was your emotional response?</p> <p>Rate your feelings (0-10)</p> <p>0 = not at all, 10 = extreme feeling</p>	<p>What did you do in response to your thoughts & feelings?</p>
<p>e.g.</p> <p>Feeling premenstrual.</p> <p>Went to put on a load of washing & there was no more washing powder.</p> <p>Got really angry & yelled at my partner that they didn't tell me they'd finished the washing powder & now I have to deal with it.</p>	<p>e.g.</p> <p>I shouldn't have to do this now</p> <p>My partner doesn't care about me</p> <p>This has messed up my day</p> <p>I'm not organized</p> <p>I can't cope with feeling like this</p>	<p>e.g.</p> <p>angry 8/10</p> <p>frustrated 7/10</p> <p>hurt 6/10</p>	<p>e.g.</p> <p>Told my partner he was selfish & inconsiderate</p> <p>Threw the empty box on the floor</p> <p>Left the house & slammed the door</p> <p>Felt really bad afterwards</p>

final summary

Every woman's experience of PMS is different & is affected by a range of biological, psychological & social influences.

Because of this it's important to pay attention to your experiences & put a number of strategies into practice that will ease your symptoms.

The main points are:

- Look after your mind & body
- Reduce stress & increase pleasure in your life across the month
- Look after your relationships
- Get support & help from others
- Reduce the demands on yourself during your premenstrual phase
- Access health care services

If you maintain a range of helpful practices over a few months - you'll notice changes in your experience of PMS.

It's a good idea to keep track of how you are premenstrually so that you'll be able to notice any changes over time.

further help

Looking After Yourself by Accessing Health Care Services

Because of the many factors associated with women's experiences of PMS it's wise to tackle your self-care from different angles. This might include looking at available treatments that address biological, psychological & social aspects.

ACCESSING HEALTH CARE SERVICES

The self help measures in this pack should complement regular health care checks with your doctor. There's no 1 medical treatment for PMS that works for all women with these symptoms. Your doctor would need to talk to you about your particular symptoms, & see if there's a treatment that might help you - such as medication or referral to a specialist service.

COUNSELLING OR PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP

You might also like to think about seeing a counsellor, therapist or clinical psychologist for help with your PMS. There are a range of different approaches & styles of counselling or therapy. In most short-term counselling, a therapist or counsellor will aim to help you to recognize those stressors that make your PMS worse & help you to work out ways to cope with your premenstrual symptoms. In recent research, psychological treatment has been shown to be helpful in treating premenstrual symptoms.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

There are a range of complementary forms of treatment such as acupuncture, naturopathy, homeopathy, Chinese herbalists, aromatherapy & reflexology. These approaches tend to be holistic - which means they look at the whole person rather than just treat premenstrual symptoms. Many women find these methods effective in easing PMS.

references

Research studies & text books from which the information in this pack has been drawn:

Blake, F., Salkovskis, P., Gath, D., Day, A., & Garrod, A. (1998). Cognitive therapy for premenstrual syndrome: A controlled trial. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 45(4), 307-318.

Gottman, J.M. (1999). *The marriage clinic: A scientifically based marital therapy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Hendrix, H. (1993). *Getting the love you want: A guide for couples*. London: Simon & Schuster.

Hunter, M.S., Ussher, J.M., Cariss, M., Browne, S., Jolley, R., & Katz, M. (2002a). Medical (fluoxetine) & psychological (cognitive-behavioural) treatment for premenstrual dysphoric disorder: A study of treatment process. *Journal of Psychosomatic research*, 53(811-817).

Kirkpatrick, M.K., Brewer, J.A., & Stocks, B. (1990). Efficacy of self-care measures for perimenstrual syndrome (PMS). *Journal of advanced nursing*, 15(3), 281-285.

Luquet, W. (1996). *Short-term couples therapy: The imago model in action*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Perz, J., & Ussher, J.M. (2006). Women's experience of premenstrual change: A case of silencing the self. *Journal of Reproductive & Infant Psychology*, 24(4), 289-303.

Ussher, J., M (2002). Processes of appraisal & coping in the development & maintenance of Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 12, 1-14.

Ussher, J.M., Hunter, M., & Cariss, M. (2002). A woman-centred psychological intervention for premenstrual symptoms, drawing on cognitive-behavioural & narrative therapy. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 9, 319-331.

Ussher, J.M. (2003). The ongoing silencing of women in families: An analysis & rethinking of premenstrual syndrome & therapy. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 25, 388-405.

Ussher, J.M. (2004). Premenstrual Syndrome & Self-policing: Ruptures in Self-Silencing Leading to Increased Self-Surveillance & Blaming of the Body. *Social Theory & Health*, 2(3), 254-272.

Ussher, J.M. (2006). *Managing the Monstrous Feminine: Regulating the reproductive body* London: Routledge

Ussher, J.M., & Perz, J. (2006). An evaluation of self-help interventions for moderate to severe premenstrual distress conducted from a feminist critical realist standpoint. *Journal of Reproductive & Infant Psychology*, 24(2), 347-362.

appendices

We have reproduced blank forms here that you can copy & use on a regular basis. They will help you to keep putting into practice some of the strategies in the self-help pack so that over time, you will continue to benefit.

Forms provided here include:

- A Daily Diary
- Assertiveness Self-assessment
- Enjoyable Activities List
- Activity Scheduling
- Activity Balancing
- Bad Day Report
- Thought Record Form
- What is PMS like for you now

assertiveness self-assessment

Practice some self-assessment for a month & see whether there were occasions when you weren't happy about something but you didn't say anything about it.

Finding answers for the following questions will help you evaluate your assertiveness.

Over the last month were there times when you didn't ask for help or express your needs about something? In what situation(s) did this occur?

What happened as a result? How did you react? How did others in the situation react?

What was your emotional response to the way things turned out? Did you keep your feelings to yourself & end up feeling angry or resentful? Or did you explode angrily & feel bad about it afterwards?

What could you have said in an assertive way that would have let you express your feelings or wishes?

assertiveness self-assessment

List of enjoyable activities

To start you thinking about what you enjoy, try the following exercise.

Make a list of 10 things you enjoy doing most. It may include: walking, seeing friends, lying in the bath, cooking or eating, reading, window-shopping, movies, sport, yoga, art, education, travel, watching a favourite TV programme etc. They can be activities on your own or with other people.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

scheduling activities

It may help to plan pleasant activities & fit them into your daily routine, like making a date with yourself in your diary. Choose 5 of your favourite activities that you plan to do this week. List which days you plan to do them.

Monday _____

Friday _____

Tuesday _____

Saturday _____

Wednesday _____

Sunday _____

Thursday _____

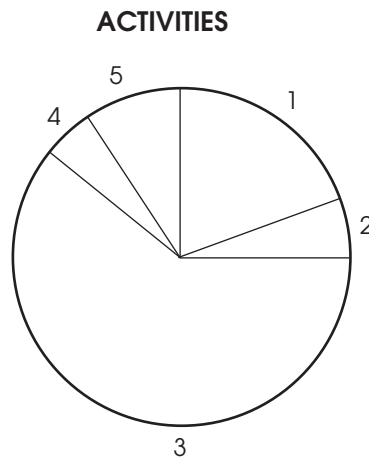
Try to do at least 1 thing for yourself every day.

bad day report

Some people also find it helpful to look at how they balance their activities over an average day. On the chart below jot down how much time, in an average day, you spend doing different activities (use any headings you like).

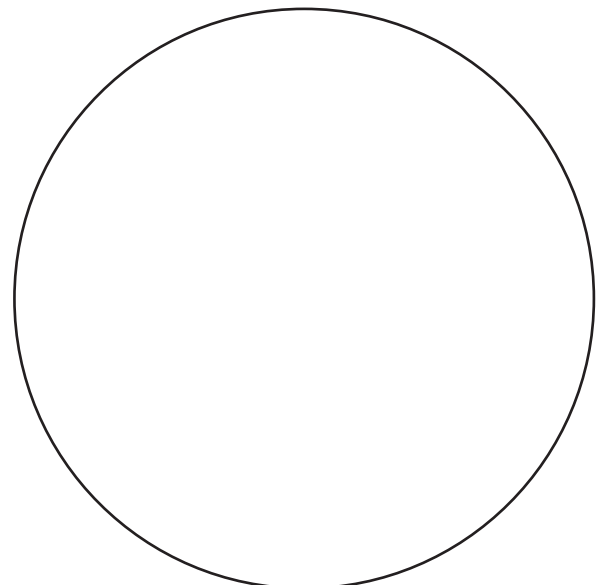
For example:

- 1. Housework & looking after family
- 2. Watching TV
- 3. Paid work
- 4. Exercise/Recreation
- 5. Seeing friends



Now draw another one of how you'd like to balance your lifestyle.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____



bad day report

Date: _____ Day of Menstrual Cycle: _____

What happened - who, what, where

How did you react - feelings, behaviours, thoughts.

Foods eaten (Also note any long stretches without eating):

Coffee/tea & alcohol intake: _____

Current stressors: _____

bad day report

Review of several days later

How does the day look in retrospect?

Are there issues which may still be important?

What could you do to tackle any problems or causes of difficulty?

What have you discovered?

thought record

<p>Situation - what was happening?</p> <p>Who, what, when, where.</p> <p>Were you premenstrual?</p>	<p>What were you thinking?</p> <p>What did you say to yourself?</p> <p>What went through your mind?</p>	<p>What feelings did you notice?</p> <p>What was your emotional response?</p> <p>Rate your feelings (0-10)</p> <p>0 = not at all, 10 = extreme feeling</p>	<p>What did you do in response to your thoughts & feelings?</p>
---	---	--	---

what is pms like for you now?

INSTRUCTIONS: PLEASE CIRCLE A NUMBER FROM 1 TO 10 FOR EACH QUESTION.

1. To what extent do you find your PMS distressing?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|
(not at all distressing) (extremely distressing)

2. To what extent does PMS interfere with your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|
(not at all) (very much indeed)

3. To what extent do you feel that you can deal with your PMS?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|
(not at all) (very well indeed)

4. In most relationships there are some areas of tension between people & this can sometimes feel worse during the premenstrual phase. How much is this the case for you?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|
(not at all) (a lot)

5. Can you indicate your level of desire to be alone premenstrually?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|____|
(not at all) (a lot)

survey about the self-help pack

If you have read the PMS Self-help Pack & have tried some of the strategies for four months we would be interested to hear what you have to say about it. You can do this by completing the survey below & sending it to the following reply-paid address. You won't need to put a stamp on your envelope. Your feedback provides valuable information to help us to continue to improve treatments for PMS.

PsyHealth PMS study
School of Psychology
Building 24, Bankstown Campus
University of Western Sydney
Reply Paid 70475
PENRITH SOUTH DC NSW 2750

Instructions – *The following questions are about your view of the self-help pack you have used in the last four months. Please respond to each question as it relates to your most recent premenstrual phase.*

1. Has your PMS reduced since trying the suggestions in the self-help pack?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|
(not at all distressing) (a great deal)

2. How helpful were the self-help suggestions in reducing your premenstrual symptoms?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|
(not at all helpful) (very helpful)

3. How helpful was the self-help pack in changing the way you experience PMS in relationship situations?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|_____|
(not at all helpful) (very helpful)

survey about the self-help pack

4. What did you particularly like about the self-help pack?

5. What did you dislike or find difficult about the suggestions in the self-help pack?

6. What (if any) have been the positive consequences of trying the suggestions in the self-help pack?
