

Usdaw

Campaigning
For Equality

Women's Equality Women's Health – Pre-Menstrual Syndrome and Period Pains



An advice leaflet
for Usdaw Members



Pre-menstrual syndrome and period pains

This leaflet gives information to women about pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) and period pains and offers advice on how to deal with the symptoms and difficulties experienced during the menstrual cycle.

What is pre-menstrual syndrome?

Pre-menstrual syndrome is now widely accepted as a recognised medical condition which affects one in three women.

Pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) is often referred to as pre-menstrual tension. It describes a range of symptoms, including:

- Tiredness.
- Irritability.
- Weepiness.
- Lack of concentration.
- Sore and tender breasts.
- Feeling bloated.
- Backache.

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What are period pains?

Some women experience painful periods with severe cramping sometimes accompanied by nausea. Periods vary from woman to woman and can change over a woman's life. There are numerous medical treatments for painful periods and PMS, but some women are reluctant to take medication every month.

Keeping a menstrual calendar

Some women find it helpful to keep a menstrual calendar which logs their symptoms and when they occur. It can help women to think about their lives and how they feel. This can then assist in dealing with the pressures experienced during the menstrual cycle. It can also allow women to distinguish between menstrual difficulties and other sources of stress and illness. A simple calendar is printed on the back of this leaflet.

What can we do about it?

Cramps and pains

The womb muscles need calcium and oxygen to contract and expel the womb lining, ie menstrual blood. Increasing our intake of calcium and oxygen can help.

- Natural calcium is found in foods like milk, tuna, salmon and dairy products. It can be taken in tablet form. To increase the absorption of calcium, it is necessary to increase the intake of Vitamin D, which can be taken in tablet form or in foods like margarine, or absorbed through exposure to sunlight.
- Increase oxygen flow with exercise, including deep breathing (the natural inclination is to curl up, which slows down oxygen flow).
- Heat often helps. Try a warm bath or hot water bottle.
- Gently rubbing the pelvic area and massaging the lower back can be beneficial.

Fluid retention/bloatedness

Irritability, tiredness and bloatedness are partially caused by fluid retention.

- Reducing salt intake and increasing potassium (found naturally in bananas, oranges, figs, tomatoes) can assist.
- Parsley, cucumber, watermelon, aubergines and watercress are foods which can help to reduce fluid retention.

Irritability/depression

For many of us, problems and worries take on a new significance during our pre-menstrual period. We just can't seem to handle things as we usually do.

Case Study

Sandra, an Usdaw member at a large distribution site suffered very heavy bleeding each month. This caused pain, mood change and eventually depression. She spoke with her Usdaw rep who made the case that, together, these symptoms had a substantial, adverse effect on her ability to carry out day-to-day activities. Her manager agreed and the company accepted that she was covered by the Equality Act. Her employer made 'reasonable adjustments' to her job, allowing her to report on a weekly basis to a female manager. The company also adjusted Sandra's performance targets for those weeks in which she was affected – reducing it from 75% to 70%.

- Many women find taking Vitamin B6 and Evening Primrose Oil a great help. These can be taken in tablet form. Whole grains, yeast, peanuts, fresh fish and meat, especially liver, are sources of Vitamin B6.
- Diet appears to be important, getting fresh fruit and vegetables, eating less meat and more non-meat protein, like fish, cheese and eggs.
- Most important, get support for yourself from those around you so that they understand how you feel and what they can do to support you.

Getting support from friends

Talking about how we feel before, during and after periods is important. It can enable us to identify pressures or difficulties we experience.

Getting support at work

If you have severe period pain to such an extent that it has a substantial, adverse effect on your ability to carry out day-to-day activities, you might be entitled to 'reasonable adjustments' at work. Few women will fall into this category but if you do you should talk to your Usdaw rep.

For further information

For more information about PMS you can contact the following:

The National Association for
Pre-Menstrual Syndrome
41 Old Road
East Peckham
London TN12 5AP

Tel: 0844 815 7311
email: contact@pms.org.uk
web: pms.org.uk



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Menstrual calendar

Day	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
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Symptoms: **D** = Depression, **T** = Tearfulness, **I** = Irritability/Tension, **A** = Backache,
B = Swollen Breasts, **S** = Swollen Stomach, **H** = Headache

Usdaw contacts

To find out more about the work of the Divisional Equalities Forums and Usdaw's equality work or about joining Usdaw contact:

South Wales and Western Division

Cardiff Office
Tel: 029 2073 1131
email: cardiff@usdaw.org.uk

Eastern Division

Waltham Cross Office
Tel: 01992 709280
email: walthamx@usdaw.org.uk

Midlands Division

Redditch Office
Tel: 01527 406290
email: redditch@usdaw.org.uk

North Eastern Division

Leeds Office
Tel: 0113 232 1320
email: leeds@usdaw.org.uk

Scottish Division

Glasgow Office
Tel: 0141 427 6561
email: glasgow@usdaw.org.uk

Southern Division

Morden Office
Tel: 020 8687 5950
email: morden@usdaw.org.uk

North West Division

Warrington Office
Tel: 01925 578050
email: warrington@usdaw.org.uk

Equalities Section

Usdaw
188 Wilmslow Road
Manchester M14 6LJ
Tel: 0161 224 2804
email: equalitymatters@usdaw.org.uk



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Winning for members
www.usdaw.org.uk/equalities

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