

Diet Tips for PMS

There's no doubting that PMS symptoms can make life miserable for sufferers & have a major impact on any diet plan.

Feeling our waistbands tighten & seeing an increase on the scales once a month can severely affect our motivation & make us wonder why we're even bothering. Fortunately, as this weight gain tends to be caused by an increase in fluid rather than fat, the effects are usually temporary. More worrying though, is the impact Premenstrual Syndrome can have on our eating & exercising habits. Just one week's worth of giving into carb cravings, comfort eating on fatty & sugary foods & skipping exercise due to a lack of energy can potentially undo our successful dieting days.

The result: we don't lose any weight - or worse still, actually gain a little.

1. **Avoid the bathroom scales** - constantly jumping on & off the scales prior to your period has the potential to make you feel depressed. Similarly, all those tight-fitting clothes you've just congratulated yourself on getting into, might not fit if you suffer from bloating so don't beat yourself up if you struggle to get back into them for a few days - simply banish them to the back of the wardrobe for a week.
2. **Eat a healthy, balanced diet** - there's no need to follow a '*special*' diet to beat the symptoms of PMS. A diet that eases PMS also helps with weight loss & can reduce the risk of diseases such as diabetes, heart disease & cancer. Many women with PMS have been shown to be deficient in certain vitamins & minerals, so it's particularly important to eat plenty of nutrient-rich foods. It's also worth bearing in mind that a healthy diet eaten throughout the month may help to ease PMS symptoms in the long term so don't just look at changing your diet prior to your period - make healthier eating habits a long-term habit.
3. **Eat regularly and include healthy snacks** - skipping meals or eating erratically will cause a drop in blood sugar levels, making carb cravings even worse.
4. **Eat plenty of high fiber, non-starchy foods with a low glycemic index (such as fruits & vegetables - better still these foods also help to boost Serotonin levels in the brain)**- it's thought some women may be more sensitive to the effects of low blood sugar levels prior to their period. Opting for foods that release sugar into the blood slowly & steadily will help to prevent dips that can make symptoms such as irritability, cravings, poor concentration & tiredness even worse.
5. **Fill up on foods rich in an amino acid called tryptophan (which the body uses to make Serotonin)**. Good sources of tryptophan include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, nuts & seeds.
6. **Eat more foods rich in vitamin B6** - much is written in the press about the benefits of taking vitamin B6 to help ease the symptoms of PMS, but to date, there's still no conclusive proof that it works. Health experts say that large doses can cause nerve damage so recommend having **no more** than 10mg of B6 per day in the form of supplements, unless advised otherwise by a health professional. It won't do any harm to make sure your diet includes plenty of foods rich in the vitamin such as chicken, turkey, fish (especially oily fish) bananas & nuts.
7. **Pack in the magnesium** - many women with PMS have been found to be deficient in this mineral, while the American College of Obstetrics & Gynecologists suggests that magnesium may help to reduce bloating, breast tenderness & mood swings. Good sources include bananas, nuts & seeds. (*OTC Magnesium 250-400mg/day*)
8. **Cut back on salt** - a high salt diet doesn't just increase blood pressure. It makes fluid retention worse by encouraging the body to hold on to water. Flavor meals with garlic, herbs or spices rather than salt & eat fewer salty foods.
9. **Reduce/ Eliminate coffee, tea & soda**- caffeine is a stimulant & can result in insomnia & poor sleep patterns, especially if you drink it later in the day. Choose herbal or decaf fruit teas.
10. **Fill up on foods that act as natural diuretics** - parsley, onions, celery, cucumber, watercress, asparagus, tomatoes, carrots, melons & citrus fruits are good choices & have the added bonus of being low in fat & calories. Also consider drinking dandelion leaf tea (*available in health food stores*) it may help with fluid retention.
11. **Consider taking primrose oil supplements**. It has been known to ease breast tenderness, or opt for a supplement designed specifically for PMS - but check the vitamin B6 content & avoid anything that contains more than 10mg in a daily dose.
12. **Get plenty of exercise** - being active helps increase levels of endorphins to give you a natural high.