



FROM THE OFFICE OF DR.

# What is premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)?

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) is a severe form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS). PMS affects approximately 75% of women in their childbearing years, while PMDD affects only 3% to 8% in this group.

## Why does PMDD occur?

No one knows what causes PMDD. It is believed that fluctuating hormone levels in the second half of the menstrual cycle may influence the chemical balance in the brain, which can affect mood. Risk factors may include stressful life changes, previous history of mood disorders, and a family history of psychiatric disorders.

## What are symptoms of PMDD?

- Feeling sad or tearful
- Anxiety or irritability, leading to interpersonal conflicts
- Decreased interest in usual activities
- Difficulty concentrating
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Changes in appetite, leading to binge eating or craving specific foods
- Feeling overwhelmed or out of control
- Physical symptoms such as breast tenderness, bloating, headaches, or joint pain

## How is PMDD diagnosed?

There is no particular test to diagnose PMDD. Your doctor will ask you to describe your symptoms and when they occur in relation

to your menstrual cycle. You may also be asked to fill out a chart listing your symptoms for 2 to 3 months. Blood tests can also be done to rule out other conditions that can cause similar symptoms.

## How is PMDD treated?

Your physician will discuss different treatment options. To begin, you may be asked to make changes in your diet and lifestyle. It may also be recommended that you speak with a counselor about your symptoms. Medications can be used as well to control symptoms, depending on the individual. These may be taken for 10 to 14 days before each menstrual cycle.

## Which medications are used?

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are often used to treat PMDD. These work by increasing a chemical in the brain known as serotonin—it is thought that serotonin levels may be low in women with PMDD. Of note, these medications may also be used to treat patients who are depressed, but that does not mean you have depression.

## Where can I find out more?

- The Cleveland Clinic Disease Management Project ([www.clevelandclinicmeded.com](http://www.clevelandclinicmeded.com))
- National Institutes of Health ([www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus))
- The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists ([www.acog.com](http://www.acog.com)).



This information is provided by your physician and the *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*. It is not designed to replace a physician's medical assessment and judgment.

This page may be reproduced noncommercially to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine* approval. Bulk color reprints available by calling 216-444-2661.

For patient information on hundreds of health topics, see the Patient Education and Health Information web site, [www.clevelandclinic.org/health](http://www.clevelandclinic.org/health)