

# Mental Health for Menstruators



A woman's guide to navigating  
their mental health during that  
time of the month.



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# Introduction

## Why Menstruation?

Hello! My name is Stella and I am an undergraduate at The College of New Jersey studying psychology. As someone with a menstrual disorder, managing my mental health has been a challenge. I wish when I was getting diagnosed that someone had handed me a toolkit and told me that help is available and that my mental struggles were real.

Mental health, specifically for menstruating women, is often overlooked. Women are expected to manage their periods quietly and to not talk about what they are going through every month. Menstruation itself is a taboo topic, but I want you to take your time to read through this toolkit and understand that there is support and that your experiences are valid.

- Stella Petrou (NAMI Mercer Intern  
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# Did You Know?

1. 64% of women of all ages report mood-related symptoms every menstrual cycle

2. 1 in 12 women have PMDD

3. Women have a 17% greater risk of committing suicide during the premenstrual phase

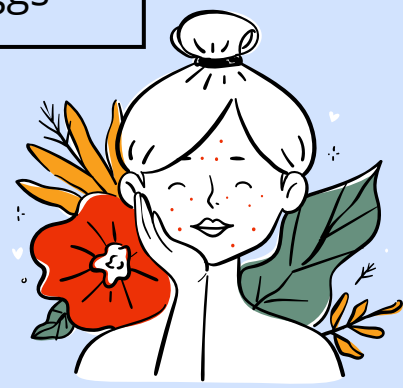
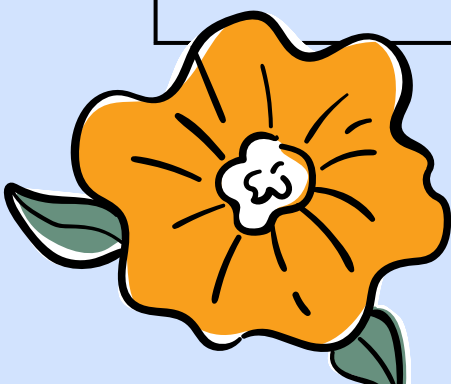
Sources: 1. UVA Health, 2. Verywell Health, 3. National Institute of Health



# Intro to Hormones

A lot of the times people mistake their symptoms as something that is wrong with their head, when in fact, it is just their body signaling that changes are occurring. General knowledge of one's hormones can be really helpful in knowing what is going on in your body. Below is just a brief overview of a few hormones you should know about.

Estrogen	Enables ovaries, uterus, and vagina to work properly
Progesterone	Prepares endometrium for a fertilized egg - sheds if no egg
Luteinizing Hormone (LH)	Controls menstrual cycle and triggers ovulation
Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH)	Also helps control the menstrual cycle and production of eggs



# PMS: Not Just Mood Swings

The typical symptom associated with PMS is mood swings. However, mood swings are not the only indicator that a woman is about to start menstruating.

PMS symptoms can range from being mild to severe, and they impact women differently. Some women are barely affected by their premenstrual symptoms, while others are severely affected. Symptoms can range from severity and depending on the person, they can use different treatment and/or management techniques.

Symptoms include, but are not limited to:

- Tension or anxiety
- Depressed mood
- Social withdrawal
- Poor concentration
- Joint or muscle pain
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Acne

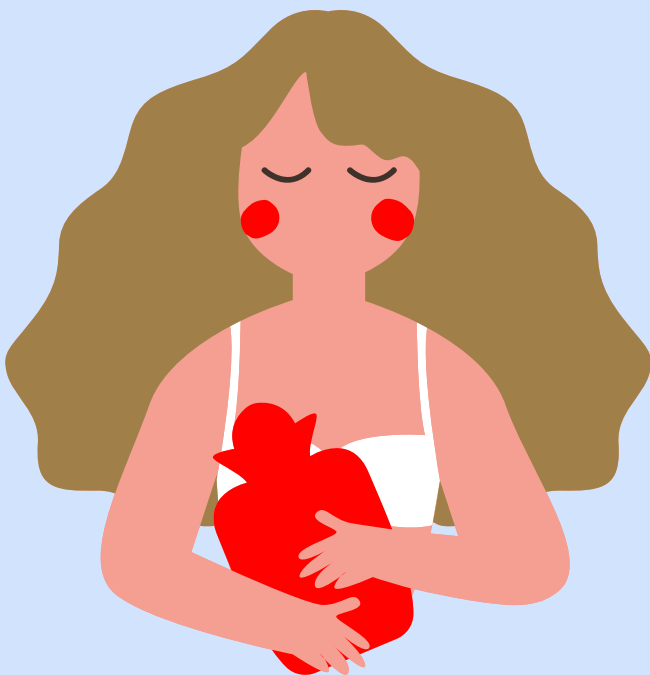


# PMS: Self Care

Being on your period is no easy feat. Having to manage life while in pain is something that menstruators should be proud, not ashamed of. Below are some tips to take care of yourself while menstruating.

*Reminder: \*Give yourself grace\**

## Self Care Tips



- Do light stretching
- Take a hot bath
- Drink tea
- Use a heating pad
- Go on a walk
- Journal
- Prioritize rest and sleep
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol
- Take painkillers

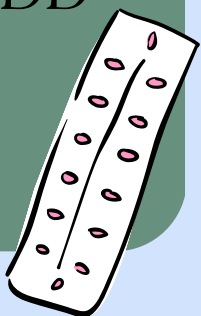
# PMDD



Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, also known as PMDD, is an overlooked and under diagnosed mental disorder resulting from menstruation. Some symptoms are suicidal ideation and feeling hopeless while menstruating.

It takes women a long time to get diagnosed with PMDD. This could be for a number of reasons: not being taken seriously by their doctor, their doctor being unaware of this condition, etc.

PMS symptoms are magnified with this condition. There are not a lot of treatments available for menstruators suffering from PMDD





# PME

Premenstrual Exacerbation (PE) is an endocrine condition and a mental health condition. It causes pre-existing mental disorders to worsen, especially during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle. The luteal phase is the phase right before menstruation, and this is the time where someone's mental health can really plummet due to PE.

## *What's the Difference?*

The difference between PMDD and PME is that PMDD is the cause of mental struggles, while PME exacerbates pre-existing conditions.



# Menstrual Disorders

Menstrual disorders can lead to mental health challenges to women. These disorders do not make one any less of a woman. However, they come with their own sets of challenges, such as managing pain and physical as well as mental symptoms.

Menstrual Disorder	Symptoms	Quick Facts
Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Irregular periods</li><li>• Excessive body hair</li><li>• Weight gain</li><li>• Acne</li><li>• Infertility</li><li>• Thinning hair</li><li>• Cysts on ovaries</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Affects 1 in 10 women</li><li>• Symptoms of depression or anxiety are more common in women with PCOS</li></ul>
Endometriosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Painful periods</li><li>• Excessive bleeding</li><li>• Infertility</li><li>• Pain with intercourse</li><li>• Pain with bowel movements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Affects 10% of women globally</li><li>• No known cure</li><li>• It is hereditary</li><li>• Most treatments focus on managing symptoms</li></ul>
Premature Ovarian Failure (POF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Amenorrhea</li><li>• Hot flashes</li><li>• Night sweats</li><li>• Vaginal dryness</li><li>• Decreased sexual desire</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Also called primary ovarian insufficiency</li><li>• Rare - about 1% of women is affected by it</li></ul>

# Resources



The International Association for Premenstrual Disorders (IAPMD) is a nonprofit that offers great resources for women looking for PMDD support groups, information, and education.



Vicious Cycle is a patient-led website that offers opportunities for patients to learn more about PMDD and to find resources about their condition.

Apps such as Flo, Clue, and PeriodTracker can be used to help track your period and learn more about your symptoms. They do not have a focus on menstrual disorders but they help one learn more about their menstrual cycle in general.



# Conclusion

I hope this toolkit helped your understanding of the relationship between a woman's physical and mental health. Conditions such as PMDD affect more women than people think and education is key to ending stigma surrounding these issues.



You are not alone in your struggles. Although things may seem tough now, I can say with certainty from personal experience that things can and will get better.

