



Cramps, bloating, mood swings—yeah, periods can suck. But with these expert tips, you can beat even the ickiest PMS symptoms and make it through the month.

by Melissa Perkins

# Banish PMS FOREVER!

**H**ow bad is your PMS? OK, that's a trick question—any girl who's bloated, crampy, broken out, headachy and gorging on pretzels dipped in ice cream is gonna feel like a 10 on the grump-o-meter. So why is your body doing this? "Your hormone levels have natural cycles where they rise and fall," explains Dr. Larissa Hirsch, a medical expert for Teens-Health.org. "When the hormones change, PMS happens." But why waste precious time feeling gross? Here's how to conquer your PMS symptoms. One. By. One.

## Mood Swings

**THE CAUSE** Some girls' hormonal changes mess with the brain's serotonin, a hormone that improves moods. The result? A gloom 'n' doom attitude.

**THE CURE** "Avoid caffeine. It can make you a little more anxious, and that can make mood swings worse," Dr. Hirsch says. Studies find that calcium might help prevent crankiness during PMS, so make sure you're getting your three cups a day of dairy. Get plenty of sleep, and stay active. "Exercise will help your mood," Dr. Hirsch adds. And it can't hurt to warn your friends and family when PMSing—they'll know not to take your crabby 'tude personally.

## Killer Cramps

**THE CAUSE** Every month, the inner lining of the uterus builds up to prep for a possible pregnancy. If no fertilized egg appears, the uterus sheds its lining and starts from scratch for the next month. When that happens, hormones called prostaglandins are released. They help the uterus squeeze out the old lining—and all that squeezing adds up to serious cramps. Not so much fun.

**THE CURE** You might feel like curling up on the couch with a bag of Cheetos, but try to get off your butt—exercise can lower prostaglandin levels. Can't bear the thought of hitting the treadmill? A

warm bath can do the trick. "Also, try a heating pad or warm compresses," suggests Dr. Hirsch. "Anything with heat can relax the muscles and make you feel better." If your cycle is pretty regular and predictable, pop an ibuprofen the day before you expect your period to ward off cramps before they hit. If nothing helps, talk to your doctor—she might prescribe pills to keep cramp-causing hormones in check.

## Bad Bloating

**THE CAUSE** When you don't get enough fluids, salt can stay in your body tissues and cause you to retain water. And those ever-pesky hormone levels can make the problem worse, so you may spend the days before your period feeling like a walking water balloon.

**THE CURE** Cut down on salty foods, and drink lots of good ol' H<sub>2</sub>O. Don't worry—consuming water won't make you retain even more. "If you drink more water, it helps you flush out that salt," Dr. Hirsch says. Fiber can also help, um, move things along, so opt for high-fiber snacks like apples, oatmeal or nuts.

## Breast Tenderness

**THE CAUSE** The rush of hormones and all the water retention can make your breasts feel swollen. You'd think a sudden boost in cup size would be a good thing, but it's so not—it can make your girls super-sensitive. Especially if you have to run the mile in gym class...



## PMS BUSTER!

"Exercise is important, not just when you're about to get your period, but all the time," Dr. Hirsch says. "Staying active can help relieve all those symptoms." And it burns calories. Here are five ways to sneak in 30 minutes of exercise.

**Go for a bike ride: 176 calories**

**Blast your iPod and dance: 137 calories**

**Take your pup for a walk: 118 calories**

**Go shopping: 97 calories**

**Clean your room: 57 calories**



## Acne Attack

**THE CAUSE** Yep, blame the hormones again. Right before your period, your body may produce extra androgen, a hormone that kicks oil glands into high gear.

**THE CURE** "Keep skin clean, but don't wash it too often," Dr. Hirsch advises. Even though you may feel greasier than normal, too much scrubbing can irritate your skin, leading to even more breakouts. So just wash twice a day with an acne-formula cleanser then spot treat with salicylic acid.

**THE CURE** "Sometimes the tenderness is just from bloating," Dr. Hirsch says, so keep on guzzling water. Ibuprofen can soothe the swelling, and upping your calcium can help here, too—so snack on low-fat cheese and yogurt.

## Painful Headaches

**THE CAUSE** For those who are prone to severe headaches or migraines (beyond-awful headaches that usually affect one side of the head), there are tons of potential triggers—from junk food to cigarette smoke to lack of sleep to...PMS. You're cranky, you're crampy, you're pigging out, and now? Hello, headache! Ugh.

**THE CURE** "Take ibuprofen or acetaminophen early on," Dr. Hirsch says. Popping a painkiller *before* you get a killer headache or migraine can help prevent it. Don't know when one is coming? "A 'headache diary' is a great thing to try," Dr. Hirsch advises. "Just keep track of when the aches occur, what was going on right before them, and what



## CRAVING BUSTERS!

Got a junk-food craving that won't go away? Try one of these healthful alternatives instead.

### SALTY

popcorn  
soy nuts  
trail mix  
pretzels

### SWEET

fruit  
popsicles  
chocolate milk  
yogurt

makes it better." Also, write down the foods you eat, the places you go and when you get your period. Review it with your doctor so she can determine if your headaches are PMS-related.

## Non-stop Cravings

**THE CAUSE** The fluctuating hormone levels make most girls feel like plowing through an entire bag of potato chips. Experts aren't 100-percent sure why hormones trigger cravings, but chances are you'll spend a few days each month drooling over salty or sweet treats.

**THE CURE** You probably can't beat 'em, so satisfy your cravings the healthful way. "While it's hard, reducing the amount of junk food can really help cut back on all those other symptoms," Dr. Hirsch says. Can't shake a craving? Stick to a teeny portion. ✨



PMS crampin' your style? Give and get advice online at "Period Peace" (our new monthly blog about your am, monthly visitor) on [girlslife.com!](http://girlslife.com/)