A GUIDE FOR TEENS, PARENTS & ANYONE SEEKING RELIEF

PMS, Pain & Cramps

A practical, compassionate guide to understanding PMS, period pain, premenstrual symptoms and heavy flow.

- EASE THE CRAMPS
- CALM PMS
- SUPPORT HEALTHY FLOW



Nourish Functional Health

Cycle health • Nutrition • Gut & mineral health

YOUR GUIDE

Start here

A practical roadmap for understanding symptoms and supporting cycle health.

Painful periods and premenstrual changes are common, but symptoms that interrupt work, school, sleep, or everyday life deserve attention. This guide begins with education, then moves into practical supports and options for looking deeper.

This guide covers four areas

01

Recognize the patterns

Types of period pain, PMS versus PMDD, and when to see a doctor.

02

Start with the basics

Blood sugar, meals, hydration, sleep, light and daily habits.

03

Explore support

Comfort measures, nutrients and targeted blends.

04

Look deeper

Environmental exposures, GI-MAP, HTMA and blood labs.

How to use this guide

Start with the educational overview and note which symptoms are most relevant to you or someone you support. For symptoms that are not severe, explore the strategies that follow. Further testing can help; it may take three or more cycles to notice a difference.

At the end: a printable period tracker and symptom sheet to help you identify patterns.

EDUCATION

Types of period pain

Dysmenorrhoea is the medical term used to describe painful periods.

Spasmodic period pain

Often begins just before or as bleeding starts, with squeezing or wave-like cramps in the lower abdomen, back or thighs. It can be strongest during the first 1–2 days. Prostaglandins drive stronger uterine contractions and may accompany nausea, loose stools or headaches.

POSSIBLE ROOT CAUSES TO EXPLORE

Inflammatory prostaglandin signaling; gut or digestive concerns; magnesium, zinc, selenium, vitamin E or B6 status; dietary fat balance; oxidative stress; and stress.

Congestive period pain

Often felt as aching, heaviness, fullness or pelvic pressure that builds in the days before a period, sometimes with bloating, breast tenderness, backache or mood changes. It may ease when bleeding begins or continue into the period.

POSSIBLE ROOT CAUSES TO EXPLORE

Thyroid health, ovulation and progesterone–estrogen balance, stress, and mineral status. In my clinic, I often find copper imbalances with heavier-than-normal PMS symptoms. HTMA helps assess mineral patterns.

These patterns can overlap

Some women experience premenstrual heaviness and strong cramps when bleeding starts. Tracking symptom timing and intensity can help identify her pattern.

What about PMDD?

Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) is more than difficult PMS. It involves severe, cyclical emotional symptoms that can disrupt work, school, relationships and daily life. PMDD is often linked to heightened brain sensitivity to normal hormone fluctuations after ovulation, especially progesterone's neuroactive metabolite allopregnanolone and its interaction with GABA signaling.

Stress-response differences, inflammation and individual susceptibility may also contribute. The next page compares PMS and PMDD.

UNDERSTANDING SYMPTOMS

PMS vs. PMDD

Both can be difficult. PMDD involves a more severe, disruptive pattern of mood symptoms.

FEATURE	PMS	PMDD
Physical symptoms	Cramps, pain, bloating, breast tenderness, headaches, fatigue	May include the same physical symptoms, alongside severe mood changes
Mood and emotions	Irritability, anxiety, sadness or mood swings; can be very difficult	Marked mood symptoms such as rage, panic, depression or intense irritability
Daily impact Can disrupt comfort, work, school, activities and relationships		Severe symptoms substantially impair daily functioning
Timing	Typically in the days before a period; eases after bleeding starts	Cyclical symptoms before bleeding, usually easing shortly after onset

When to Seek Medical Support

Arrange medical evaluation for any of the following:

- **Very heavy bleeding**
  Soaking a pad or tampon every 1–2 hours, or needing to double up.
- **Long or unusual bleeding**
  Periods lasting more than 7 days, or large clots.
- **Disabling pain**
  Missing work, school or activities, or pain not responding to usual relief.
- **Possible low iron**
  Dizziness, breathlessness or marked exhaustion.
- **Bleeding or cycle concerns**
  Heavy bleeding from the first period, easy bruising, frequent nosebleeds, no period by 15, or periods absent for 3 months.
- **Severe mood symptoms**
  Intense depression, anxiety or emotional changes that disrupt daily life.

If symptoms are not severe, explore the supportive options that follow. Additional testing may help identify contributors; allow three or more cycles to assess changes.

THE FOUNDATIONS

Start with the basics

Small, consistent habits can make a meaningful difference throughout the cycle.

Steady blood sugar

Start with a protein-rich breakfast, then eat meals consistently throughout the day. Avoid long gaps without food to help support steady blood sugar, energy and mood. Include protein, fiber and healthy fats.

FOOD SOURCES Eggs, meat, legumes, fruit, vegetables and whole grains.

Sleep & stress

Prioritize restorative sleep: most adults need 7–9 hours, while teens generally need 8–10. Blue light from screens can disrupt circadian rhythm. If possible, have her put devices to bed in another room. A few minutes of outdoor morning light shortly after waking can help set the body clock and support a natural daily rhythm.

Hydration & movement

A practical hydration starting point is about half your body weight (in pounds) in ounces of mineralized water daily. Minerals are key. Adjust for activity, weather and individual needs; walking and stretching may ease cramps.

First-line comfort: heat & infrared

Try a heating pad or infrared warmth over the lower abdomen or back. An Epsom salt bath combines comforting heat with magnesium salts and may help ease muscle tension.

SUPPORTIVE NUTRIENTS & SUPPLEMENTS

Omega-3s, Ginger & Magnesium

Three commonly discussed supports for menstrual pain and muscle tension.

Omega-3s

EPA and DHA may influence prostaglandin-related inflammation. Small trials suggest they can reduce menstrual pain.

IN CLINIC	I often consider 1,000 mg combined EPA/DHA daily as a starting point, adjusted to age and needs.
FOOD SOURCES	Salmon, sardines, mackerel; walnuts, flax and chia provide ALA.

Ginger

Ginger has evidence for reducing primary menstrual cramps, particularly around the start of bleeding.

IN CLINIC	A commonly studied approach is 250 mg ginger extract 3–4 times daily for the first 2–3 days of bleeding; dosing depends on the preparation and age.
FOOD SOURCES	Fresh ginger tea, soups, stir-fries and smoothies.

Magnesium

Magnesium supports normal muscle and nerve function and may help ease cramps, sleep difficulties and PMS.

IN CLINIC	A common adult starting range is 100–200 mg elemental magnesium daily; tailor for age, tolerance and mineral status. An Epsom salt bath adds soothing heat and may help muscle relaxation.
FOOD SOURCES	Pumpkin seeds, leafy greens, legumes, nuts and cacao.

SUPPORTIVE NUTRIENTS & SUPPLEMENTS

Curcumin, Calcium & Zinc

Nutrients and plant compounds with different roles in inflammation and menstrual comfort.

Curcumin

The concentrated compound in turmeric has anti-inflammatory activity. Early studies suggest potential benefits for PMS and menstrual pain.

IN CLINIC	A possible starting range is 100–200 mg curcuminoids daily; review medications and the specific formulation.
FOOD SOURCES	Turmeric in cooking, alongside a little fat.

Calcium

Calcium supports neuromuscular function and adequate intake may help PMS symptoms.

IN CLINIC	I really want an HTMA before supplementing. A calcium-shell pattern may need to be supported first.
FOOD SOURCES	Yogurt, cheese, fortified milk alternatives, tofu and sardines.

Zinc

Zinc supports progesterone-related pathways, while copper is involved in estrogen metabolism. Their balance matters. Some clients with cramping show copper-related patterns; I use HTMA to assess mineral relationships before deciding what to support.

IN CLINIC	An HTMA can help assess zinc and copper patterns. When appropriate, a common starting range is 10–15 mg zinc daily, tailored to the individual.
FOOD SOURCES	Oysters, beef, poultry, beans and pumpkin seeds.

SUPPORTIVE NUTRIENTS & SUPPLEMENTS

Vitamin B6, PharmaGABA & Vitamin E

Supporting mood, irritability and physical symptoms in the premenstrual phase.

Vitamin B6

B6 is needed for neurotransmitter synthesis and may improve some PMS symptoms. Higher doses are not necessarily better.

IN CLINIC	I may start with 5–10 mg vitamin B6 (P5P) daily, accounting for B6 in other supplements.
FOOD SOURCES	Poultry, fish, potatoes, chickpeas and bananas.

PharmaGABA

GABA-related signaling changes across the menstrual cycle, especially in response to progesterone metabolites during the luteal phase. These changes may contribute to mood sensitivity, irritability and anxiety in some individuals.

IN CLINIC	Natural Factors Stress-Relax Pharma GABA 100 mg is a product I use in selected cases. I consider it for premenstrual irritability, anxiousness and stress, based on individual needs.

HEADS UP: Severe premenstrual mood symptoms deserve further evaluation.

Vitamin E

Vitamin E helps protect cells, including the corpus luteum, from oxidative stress and supports normal reproductive function.

IN CLINIC	400 IU with food.
FOOD SOURCES	Sunflower seeds, almonds, hazelnuts and wheat germ oil.

SUPPORTIVE NUTRIENTS & SUPPLEMENTS

Fiber, vitamin D & iron

Heavy periods can contribute to fatigue and depleted iron stores. Testing helps identify what support is appropriate.

Fiber & gut regularity

Fiber supports bowel regularity and normal elimination. Gut health matters for overall hormone metabolism, but fiber alone is not a proven treatment for heavy bleeding.

FOOD SOURCES — Vegetables, beans, oats, berries, flaxseed and chia.

Vitamin D + Vitamin A

These fat-soluble vitamins work in overlapping regulatory pathways, and I consider their balance rather than looking at D alone.

IN CLINIC — I recommend blood testing for both vitamin D and vitamin A to help determine a starting dose.

FOOD SOURCES — Vitamin D: salmon, sardines, egg yolks. Preformed vitamin A (retinol): beef liver, cod liver oil, egg yolks and dairy.

Iron

Heavy periods can drain iron stores and contribute to fatigue, dizziness and brain fog. Too much iron can also be harmful, so test first.

IN CLINIC — I work to optimize iron recycling through co-factor optimization. Blood work + HTMA helps assess the overall picture. When iron support is needed, I may start with beef liver or spleen, followed by lactoferrin. I also consider gut health and possible bacterial overgrowth before iron supplementation.

FOOD SOURCES — Red meat, seafood, poultry, legumes and greens; pair plant iron with vitamin C.

TARGETED BLENDS

Two formula options

Sometimes a blend combines several of the ingredients listed above. These are two formulas I have found helpful in my clinic.

HerWellness™ Rapid Period Relief

This formula brings together turmeric and Boswellia, two botanicals studied for their effects on inflammatory pathways, with greater galangal and black sesame seed oil. Together, these ingredients may help support menstrual comfort when cramping is the main concern. Its small amount of vitamin B6 adds support for normal neurotransmitter function.

IN CLINIC

I consider this a targeted option when cramps are the main complaint. Review the product label for serving directions.

BrainMD PMS Relief+

A broader formula combining ginger with magnesium, zinc, and vitamins B1, B6 and D3. Ginger may help with prostaglandin-related cramping; magnesium supports muscle and nerve function; zinc and B vitamins contribute to normal energy and neurotransmitter metabolism. This blend may be useful when PMS involves both physical discomfort and mood or energy changes.

IN CLINIC

I review the full current Supplement Facts, particularly total vitamin B6 from all products, when determining whether this formula is appropriate.

ADDITIONAL COMFORT

Red light & Epsom salt baths

Two comfort options for cramps, tension and relaxation.

Red light therapy

Lower abdomen or lower back. Infrared and red light therapy (low-level light therapy or photobiomodulation) can help relieve primary menstrual cramps by reducing inflammation, relaxing uterine muscles, and improving pelvic blood flow.

IN CLINIC

Place a suitable device over the lower abdomen (uterine region) or lower back, following the manufacturer's instructions for distance, duration and eye protection.

SHOP RED LIGHT DEVICE

Epsom salt baths

A warm bath can help relax tense muscles and soothe menstrual cramping. Epsom salts contain magnesium sulfate; the warmth and quiet time can be especially comforting when cramps, tension or stress are high.

HOW TO TAKE AN EPSOM SALT BATH

Start with ½ cup of unscented Epsom salts in a comfortably warm bath. Stir to dissolve and soak for about 15–20 minutes. For extra calming benefit, add a little organic lavender if tolerated. Keep the water comfortably warm, not hot.

SHOP EPSOM SALTS

HEALTHY EVERYDAY CHOICES

Personal care products

Small swaps can lower everyday exposures for the whole family.

What we put on our bodies matters, too!

Some personal care and household products contain chemicals that can interfere with hormone signaling. Research has raised concerns about certain endocrine-disrupting chemicals and reproductive health, particularly during periods of hormonal development and change.

A few common offenders to look for

PHTHALATES

May be present in fragrances used in perfumes, scented laundry detergents, fabric softeners, shampoos, body washes and lotions. Some phthalates are associated with altered hormone signaling and reproductive development.

BPA & OTHER BISPHENOLS

Found in some plastics, food packaging and can linings. These compounds can mimic or interfere with estrogen signaling.

DEODORANTS & ANTIPERSPIRANTS

Some contain aluminum salts and added fragrance. Check labels and consider fragrance-free options; aluminum in antiperspirants has not been established as a typical-use endocrine disruptor.

We cannot avoid every exposure, but we do have choices. Lowering our family's everyday toxic load can benefit the whole family.

DITCH & SWITCH GUIDE

EXPLORE NOURISH SHOP

Ditch & Switch: identify big offenders. Nourish Shop: curated alternatives.

NEXT STEP

Not sure where to start?

Every woman's cycle is different. Symptoms can have more than one contributor.

A GI-MAP + HTMA

The gut environment plays an important role in hormone balance and cycle health. Digestive imbalances may also contribute to skin concerns, including acne, which is common during times of hormonal fluctuation.

Minerals are key: they support the processes that regulate hormone production, signaling and metabolism. HTMA helps us explore mineral patterns, while GI-MAP provides insight into the gut environment and digestive health.

When possible, I like to pair these with additional blood labs to look deeper at iron, copper, zinc and thyroid health. Together, these results can help us explore the landscape and identify clues to support a more balanced cycle.

EXPLORE GI-MAP + HTMA

Painful periods are common.

That doesn't mean they should be ignored.

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Educational information only. Supplement plans should be individualized with a healthcare professional, particularly when medications or underlying conditions are involved.

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

My period & symptom tracker

One month of daily tracking, with space for notes about symptoms, mood, pain and what helped.

Month: _____ First day of bleeding: _____

DATE	FLOW	PAIN 0–10	MOOD	SYMPTOMS / NOTES / WHAT HELPED
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				

Flow: light / medium / heavy • Pain: 0–10 • Note sleep, bloating, mood and relief.

PRINTABLE WORKSHEET

My period & symptom tracker (continued)

One month of daily tracking, with space for notes about symptoms, mood, pain and what helped.

Month: _____ Continue from the previous page.

DATE	FLOW	PAIN 0–10	MOOD	SYMPTOMS / NOTES / WHAT HELPED
17				
18				
19				
20				
21				
22				
23				
24				
25				
26				
27				
28				
29				
30				
31				

Flow: light / medium / heavy • Pain: 0–10 • Note sleep, bloating, mood and relief.