



MENSTRUAL CYCLE AND SLEEP

- **Most women say that their menstrual cycle affects their sleep in some way**
- **The most common time when these sleep problems happen is 3 to 6 days before having a period**
- **These symptoms may be linked to Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)**
- **Keeping a three month diary is a good first step to working out whether the sleep problems are related to the menstrual cycle**
- **There are self-help strategies that may help. One of these is to try to have more sleep just before your period**

Note: All words that are underlined relate to topics in the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au

1. Does sleep quality change across the menstrual cycle in women?

Up to 7 in 10 women say that their sleep changes just before their period. The most common time for this is 3 to 6 days before having the period.

2. Are sleeping problems a common part of Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS)?

Yes. Most women with menstrual cycle related symptoms have particular sleep issues just before the period. Some women suffer from a range of premenstrual symptoms as well as sleep problems. For others, sleep problems are the only PMS symptom. Sometimes women suffer from sleep problems regularly at other times of their menstrual cycle.

3. How does PMS affect sleep?

Women may feel that it is harder to get to sleep and stay asleep. They may have restless sleep in the days leading up to their period. Some women say they are sleepier during the day. We know that the amount of REM sleep – which is when we have most of our dreams – is less in this part of the menstrual cycle. Hormonal changes at this time (e.g. sudden drops in progesterone) affect the body's temperature control. In turn this affects sleep quality.

4. What should I do first?

Many women find that it helps to keep a diary of their symptoms for three months or so. This should list their symptoms day by day. It should also list when their period starts and stops. This is so that it can be confirmed that the sleeping problems have a link to PMS. The first step is to understand! It will also let individuals predict when they are most likely to have symptoms in the future. This means that you take



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action to help yourself - see below. You may want to discuss your symptoms with your GP. If so, your diary would be a good starting point.

5. What can I do to help my sleep?

Once you are sure your sleeping problems have a link to your menstrual cycle you will know when they are likely to appear the next month. In the days before this time, aim to get plenty of rest and sleep. Hints on our [Good Sleep Habits](#) page may help. Be sure to cut down on caffeine and alcohol at this time. You should also stay active and maintain a good diet. Try to have less sugar and salt and more calcium. Before and during your PMS try to get lots of outdoor light. Keep in mind that your poor sleep (and mood) will get better once your menstrual cycle is over. This may mean you have less frustration and anxiety about your sleep.

6. What else might help?

Some women with PMS (but not all) may have low [Melatonin](#) levels. If this is the case then taking melatonin may help your sleep symptoms. You should discuss this with your GP.

5. Should I go to my GP about this?

If your PMS symptoms are having a big impact on your quality of life, talk to your GP. You can discuss ways to make the PMS symptoms better. If you do this then your sleep will usually get better too.

6. Where can I find out more?

Information on PMS in general:

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/premenstrual-syndrome-pms

For information on other sleep related topics visit the Sleep Health Foundation Information Library at www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au. The underlined topics in this article are covered in detail there.



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