

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), eating disorders and body image



What is PMDD?

PMDD affects up to 5% of women between puberty and menopause¹ and is a severe form of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) that happens when hormone levels fall after ovulation in the week or two before your period starts and usually goes away two to three days after your period starts.

PMDD is a mood disorder characterised by more severe symptoms than PMS, including severe depression, irritability, anxiety and extreme mood swings, changes in appetite, as well as physical symptoms like breast tenderness, bloating and changes to body size and shape. It can impact daily life, relationships and sometimes lead to suicidal thoughts.

How does PMDD impact body image and eating disorders?

Research² shows that people with PMDD are more likely to experience body image issues and some eating disorders:

1 in 2 (50%)

of women who have PMDD experience body image issues
(72% more likely than the general female population)

Women who have PMDD are

3.5 times more likely

to experience Bulimia Nervosa than the general
female population.

People with PMDD may find that the physical symptoms, like bloating and changes to body size and shape, can have negative impact on body image and the severe psychological symptoms may lead to other mental illnesses, engaging in disordered eating and exercise behaviours as a coping mechanism. Additionally, the hormonal changes that take place during PMDD can result in increased appetite and cravings, which can also impact someone's relationship with food and eating.



Tips to support the wellbeing of girls during puberty:

Communicate with your care team

Tell your gynaecologist, therapist or healthcare professional about any previous history or concerns around mental illness, body image, disordered eating or eating disorders so they can offer personalised guidance and refer you to professionals that can address your concerns.

Be aware of health and diet advice

If you are prescribed an eating plan to manage the condition, it's important to engage with dietitians, therapists or psychologists with experience working with eating disorders and body image concerns. This can help ensure that your mental health is also looked after and that any dietary changes are balanced, sustainable and not harmful.

Take a body neutral approach

Research³ suggests accepting your perceived bodily 'flaws' and viewing them with compassion and kindness may help to reduce body image concerns.

Talking helps

If you're struggling, you're not alone. Speak to a trusted adult or mental health professional.

Track your cycle

Keep a record of your mood and physical symptoms using a cycle tracker app on your mobile to help identify patterns and predict when your PMDD symptoms might occur. This will help you predict when you're about to go through a challenging period and plan for extra support if needed.

Establish healthy coping mechanisms

Make self-care a priority to manage anxiety and encourage self-compassion. This could include doing activities that bring you joy or unfollowing accounts on social media that make you feel bad about your body image.

Connect with others

Reading blogs, listening to podcasts or following people on social media with experiences of PMDD can help you feel empowered, supported and not alone.

“Living with PMDD feels like walking through a fog that only clears for two weeks of every month. In those fleeting moments of clarity, I remember who I am, but the rest of the time, I feel lost in the haze, uncomfortable in my body and unable to function like a normal human being.” - Bella

Get support



Call Butterfly National Helpline

1800 ED HOPE (1800 33 4673)

or visit [Butterfly.org.au](https://butterfly.org.au)
to chat online or email,

7 days a week,
8am-midnight (AEST/AEDT).



Resources

Read stories of lived experience
and find useful resources at

[Butterfly.org.au/women](https://butterfly.org.au/women)

References

- 1 Potter, J., Bouyer, J., Trussell, J., Moreau, C. (2009). Premenstrual Syndrome Prevalence and Fluctuation over Time: Results from a French Population-Based Survey: *Journal of Women's Health*; 18(1): 31–39.
- 2 Liptember Foundation, 2024. *Uncovering the reality: examining multi-dimensional aspects of women's mental health in Australia, 2024.*