



ILLUSTRATION BY Quentin Monge

## Is Your Period Making YOU SICK?

▶ How to handle the double whammy known as PMM. BY Stacey Colino



### DO YOU SUFFER FROM PMM?

Track your symptoms over three months and rate them on a scale of 1 (low severity) to 4 (help!!!). If you're hitting 3s and 4s every cycle, talk to your doctor.

**AS IF BLOATING**, achiness, and irritability weren't enough, your monthly period has another way of making you feel lousy: It can actually exacerbate certain chronic health issues. The phenomenon is called premenstrual magnification, or PMM, and is characterized by preperiod flare-ups of conditions that are sensitive to hormonal fluctuations—everything from bulimia to asthma. Fortunately, experts are becoming more adept at treating these monthly spikes. Of course, “nothing gets better when you're premenstrual,” says Nanette Santoro, MD, professor and chair of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Colorado at Denver, but you can take steps to make sure your symptoms don't get worse. Three common conditions affected by PMM:

**MIGRAINES** Approximately 50 percent of migraines suffered by women are related to menstruation. Worse, “menstrual migraines last longer and are harder to treat,” says Teshamae Monteith, MD, director of the headache program at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine. One study found that triptans, prescribed to be taken at the first sign of an attack, are the most effective treatment for preventing menstrual migraines.

**IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME** Periods are known to wreak havoc on the G.I. system. But a week prior, women with IBS may experience intensified abdominal pain, bloating, and diarrhea, says Cynthia Yoshida, MD, professor of gastroenterology at the University of Virginia Digestive Health Center. Sufferers are advised to stay away from common IBS triggers like lactose, gluten, fiber, certain carbs, and caffeine and look for probiotics in fermented foods or supplements.

**DEPRESSION** “A woman with depression may notice her negative feelings are amplified right before her period starts,” says Elizabeth Fitelson, MD, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Columbia University Medical Center in New York. For severe mood changes that don't respond to other treatments, a doctor may recommend increasing your dose of antidepressants for two weeks prior to menstruation. In particularly severe cases of PMM, an ob-gyn may recommend suppressing your cycle using a form of continuous hormonal contraceptive. And, of course, a little extra self-care at that time of the month never hurts—advice that goes for every woman.

## EAT YOUR WAY TO LOWER CHOLESTEROL

Four foods that are good for you and great for your heart.

BY Karen Asp

Cholesterol levels matter, regardless of how young you are. A 35-year-old who lives with high cholesterol for two decades could see her risk for heart disease increase by 93 percent. To avoid that fate, cut out trans fats and cigarettes, limit saturated fats, and pick up these heart-happy foods.

### 1. Avocados

When overweight people had an avocado a day as part of a moderate-fat diet, they lowered bad (LDL) cholesterol by 10 percent and total cholesterol by 8 percent compared with when they ate an average American diet, according to research. “Avocados contain fiber and other nutrients that help block the body's absorption of cholesterol,” says lead study author Penny Kris-Etherton, PhD.

### 2. Soy

Eating 14 to 50 grams of soy foods (e.g., edamame, tofu) daily for one to four months lowered total cholesterol by 2 percent, LDL by 3 percent, and triglycerides (the fat associated with heart disease) by 4 percent, according to a 2015 meta-analysis. Results were even greater in those who were diabetic or obese. Soy may reduce the body's ability to produce cholesterol and increase its rate of deterioration, says lead study author Oluwabunmi Tokede.

### 3. Oats

We know oats can lower overall cholesterol, but a meta-analysis recently found that they can also reduce two less-talked-about measurements of bad cholesterol: non-HDL cholesterol and apoB. “Mounting evidence indicates that high levels of these can lead to increased risk of heart attack or stroke,” says lead study author Vladimir Vuksan, PhD.

### 4. Beans

Consuming 130 grams (between a half and one cup) of legumes every day may lower LDL by roughly 5 percent, according to a 2014 meta-analysis. “That correlates to roughly a 5 percent reduction in risk for heart attack and stroke,” says study coauthor John L. Sievenpiper, MD, PhD. Most Americans eat only a fifth of a serving of beans a day. Chill, anyone?