

"Folic acid, B₆ and B₁₂ are every woman's friend."

determined that chaste tree berry extract acted as an "agonist at the mu-opiate receptor." In plain English, this means that chaste tree berry attaches to opiate receptor sites in the central nervous system, reducing pain and promoting a state of relaxation. Unlike opiate drugs, however, chaste tree berry is not habit forming.

Many other respected journals, including the *Journal of Women's Health and Gender-based Medicine* and the *British Medical Journal*, have published articles that show chaste tree berry is an effective and well-tolerated treatment for the relief of PMS symptoms including depression, anxiety, cravings, and water retention.

Evening primrose oil, black currant oil, and borage oil

The oils extracted from evening primrose, black currant, and borage seeds have all been recognized as beneficial to women with PMS and menopausal hot flashes. Functioning as prostaglandin regulators, these essential fatty acid precursors help balance hormonal levels. Another important benefit of supplementing the diet with these oils, especially as we age, is their moisturizing effect on skin.

The three amigas

Folic acid, B₆, and B₁₂ are every woman's friend. These three B vitamins protect against heart disease by neutralizing high homocysteine levels,

which damage arterial walls. In addition, women of child-bearing age need folic acid to prevent birth defects. Other research shows folic acid has cancer-preventive properties. Vitamins B₆ and B₁₂ are potent stress fighters and energizers, while B₆ is especially beneficial for women with PMS. Taking a complete, high potency vitamin B complex will provide extra stress-busting benefits.

Dose up on chromium

Women can reduce their risk of diabetes by maintaining a healthy weight, limiting their sugar and refined carbohydrate intake, and supplementing with chromium. Chromium helps to put the brakes on binge eating, especially sweets. Studies involving women of all ages have shown significant improvements in glucose tolerance by taking chromium. The recommended dosage range is from 200 to 1,000 mcg daily.

Calcium and vitamin D

Researchers affiliated with the Nurses' Health Study found that higher dosages of calcium and vitamin D supplementation may not only reduce the severity of PMS symptoms, but may also prevent it in the first place.

Published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* (2005), the study reported that women with the highest intake of calcium and vitamin D had the lowest occurrence of PMS. The researchers also noted that calcium and vitamin D may reduce the risk of osteoporosis and some cancers.

Another study conducted at

Dalhousie University and published in the November 2002 issue of *Family Physician* concluded that one of the most effective treatments for PMS is a daily intake of 1200 mg of calcium.

If you are a pregnant or lactating woman, seek the advice of your qualified health professional to help determine your ideal nutritional and herbal supplement program. **a**

Of special interest to women

Dr. Mary L. Hardy, medical director of the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center program in Integrative Medicine, reviewed the published literature of rigorously controlled studies that were conducted to determine the active constituents, mechanism of action, and clinical value of specific herbal remedies traditionally used by women. Her study was published in the *Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association* (2000).

Here's Dr. Hardy's selected list of phytomedicines deemed to be safe and effective for a variety of women's health issues.

Evening primrose oil: PMS, menopause, skin

Black cohosh root extract: hot flashes

Dong quai: general tonic for women, best used in combination with other Chinese herbs

Chaste tree berry: PMS

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