



Coping with PMDD at University

Clinical Review Statement

This resource has been developed by The PMDD Project and reviewed by our Clinical Advisory Board for clinical accuracy and alignment with current evidence and guidelines.

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The PMDD Project Clinical Advisory Board

University life can be a rewarding but challenging experience, especially when managing a condition like Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD).

Navigating the academic and social pressures while dealing with severe physical and emotional symptoms can feel overwhelming, but with the right strategies, it's possible to thrive.

This guide provides tips on how to manage your PMDD while making the most of your university experience, in line with UK guidelines and available support services.

Understanding PMDD & Prioritising your Health

PMDD can cause intense mood swings, anxiety, fatigue, and physical discomfort, particularly during the luteal phase of your menstrual cycle.

Understanding how these symptoms affect you personally will help you manage your time, workload, and social life.

It's okay to say no

It's tempting to say yes to every social event at University, but it's essential to recognise your limits.

You may experience FOMO (*fear of missing out*), especially during the luteal phase, but prioritising your health is key.

During this time, avoid excessive drinking, which can worsen your mood and anxiety⁽¹⁾.

Instead, suggest alternative activities like a cinema trip, a walk, a craft night, or even a library session with friends - things that allow you to stay connected without leaving you feeling drained and anxious the next day.

Balance and moderation

University culture often revolves around nightlife and alcohol, but this doesn't have to be the case.

Many student unions offer a variety of societies and activities that don't involve drinking. Explore clubs that focus on hobbies, sports, or even academic interests.

Finding alternative ways to socialise can help you feel more in control of your health while still participating in university life.

Create a safe space for yourself

University life can be fast-paced and unpredictable, particularly if you live in student accommodation or a shared house. It's important to create a space where you can retreat and recharge when your symptoms flare up.

Your personal sanctuary

Designate a corner of your room or living space where you feel safe and comforted.

Add things that make you feel at home - fairy lights, candles, blankets, or pillows.

Your safe space should be somewhere you can relax, decompress, and have some 'me' time when you need it most. This space can be vital for managing the emotional and physical toll of PMDD.

Communicate with your University

Universities in the UK have various support systems in place to help students with health conditions, including PMDD. Open communication with your tutors, department heads, and wellbeing services is crucial to ensuring that you get the support you need.

Speak to your department

If your symptoms are affecting your studies, don't hesitate to contact your head of department.

Universities are required to provide reasonable adjustments for students with long-term health conditions.

This might include flexible deadlines, exam accommodations, or remote learning options.

They can put procedures in place to ease the pressure during your luteal phase, ensuring that you're not penalised for needing extra support.

Access wellbeing services

Most Universities offer free or low-cost counselling services, mental health support, and GP services. Many also provide free sanitary products on campus.

Reach out to the University's wellbeing team for advice on managing your symptoms and coping strategies, and take advantage of these resources when you need them.

Manage your diet and budget

Managing a healthy diet is essential for supporting both your physical and mental wellbeing, but University life often comes with a tight budget.

There are ways to eat well without breaking the bank.

Budget-friendly nutrition	
Frozen fruits and vegetables are cheap and can be stored for long periods, making them an ideal way to maintain a balanced diet. Check out the student recipe section on BBC Food, which offers quick, easy, and affordable meals.	Ensuring you have a nutrient-rich diet, especially during your luteal phase, can help manage some of the physical and emotional symptoms of PMDD.

Take control of your schedule

University can be demanding, but managing your time wisely can reduce stress and help you maintain balance. During your symptom-free phase, plan ahead and get organised with your studies so that when the luteal phase arrives, you're not overwhelmed.

Prioritise self-care
Don't feel guilty about resting when you need to. If you're feeling low or fatigued, it's okay to take a break and focus on self-care. University workloads can be intense, but by planning ahead and being mindful of your body's needs, you can prevent burnout.

Talking to friends and housemates about PMDD

Living in close quarters with others or constantly being around friends can make it difficult to find space for yourself.

It's important to communicate your needs to those around you.

Explain your symptoms

You don't have to go into too much detail, but explaining to your friends or housemates that you experience PMDD can help them understand why you might need some space or downtime.

Let them know when you're feeling overwhelmed or need quiet time, so they can support you without taking it personally.

Ask for understanding

Sometimes, just knowing that your friends and housemates are aware of your condition can reduce anxiety.

Encourage them to suggest quieter, less demanding social activities during your luteal phase, or ask for their help in creating a low-stress living environment.

Protect your sleep

Good quality sleep is essential for managing PMDD symptoms, memory, concentration and emotional regulation⁽²⁾.

University culture often encourages late nights and irregular routines, but trying to keep a fairly regular sleep and wake time (*even on days without lectures*) can make a real difference to how you feel and how well you're able to study.

Navigating University life with PMDD can be challenging, but by advocating for yourself, making use of University resources, and maintaining a healthy balance, you can thrive both academically and socially.

Remember, your health is a priority, and it's okay to set boundaries to protect your wellbeing.

If you need further support or advice, reach out to your **University's wellbeing services** or visit **The PMDD Project** for more information.

Other helpful resources

Student Minds – Student Mental Health Support
<https://www.studentminds.org.uk/>

Charlie Waller Trust – Mental Health Support for Young People
<https://charliewaller.org/>

Sources

⁽¹⁾ Johns Hopkins Medicine (n.d.), Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD), Johns Hopkins Medicine

⁽²⁾ (n.d.), The Role of Sleep and the Effects of Sleep Loss on Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Processes, PMC

Further reading

Timing of Alcohol Use and the Incidence of Premenstrual Syndrome and Probable Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder - PMC

Need urgent support?

We know that managing PMDD can be incredibly difficult, and at times, the emotional weight can feel overwhelming. If you are experiencing severe distress, suicidal thoughts, or feel you are in crisis, please know that you are not alone and that support is available. You deserve to be heard and kept safe.

If you are in immediate danger:

Please call 999 or go to your nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department immediately.

Samaritans: Call 116 123 for free, 24/7 confidential support, or visit www.samaritans.org.

Shout: Text 'SHOUT' to 85258 for free, confidential, 24/7 text support.

Please note: This resource is intended for information and peer support; it is not a substitute for professional mental health care or crisis intervention. Please reach out to your GP, local mental health services, or the resources above if you need urgent help.

