

Luteal Phase: Toolkit

The luteal phase can be one of the most challenging parts of living with PMDD.

While no toolkit can remove symptoms completely, having practical plans in place before luteal begins may help reduce stress, improve coping, and make difficult days feel more manageable. This toolkit is designed to help you create a personalised plan that works for you unique needs and circumstances.

Fuel your body right

What you eat can either soothe or worsen your symptoms. During the luteal phase, focus on foods that support hormone balance. • Complex carbs like sweet potatoes, quinoa, and oats can help with mood regulation. • Magnesium-rich foods like dark leafy greens, almonds, and bananas help with anxiety and muscle tension. • Hydration is key. Dehydration can increase fatigue and irritability. Keep a water bottle close and aim for at least 2 litres a day.	While it's tempting to reach out for quick fixes, there are some things you might want to avoid: • Caffeine can spike anxiety and disrupt sleep, so try swapping your afternoon coffee for herbal teas. • Sugary snacks may give you a quick energy boost but lead to a crash later, intensifying mood swings. • Alcohol can increase emotional sensitivity, worsen sleep quality, and trigger "hangxiety". <i>Opt for non-alcoholic alternatives when possible.</i>
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Know your triggers

Understanding your personal triggers can help you prepare for luteal and reduce unnecessary stress. Everyone's triggers are different. Building awareness can help you make supportive adjustments throughout the month.	Consider reflecting on: • Situations that worsen symptoms • Relationship challenges • Work-related pressure • Sleep disruption • Alcohol or substance use • Social overload • Changes to routine
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Plan support before you need it

Asking for help during luteal can feel overwhelming, especially when you're exhausted, emotional or struggling with brain fog. Having these conversations in advance can make it easier to access support when symptoms are at their worst.	Consider creating a plan during your follicular phase: • Tasks that can be delegated • Household responsibilities someone else can take on • Childcare support if needed • Important appointments or deadlines to be aware of • A list of people you can contact for support
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Creating a signal for support

Some people find it helpful to have a pre-agreed way of letting loved ones know they're entering luteal. The goal isn't to explain or justify your symptoms. It's to reduce the pressure of having to communicate complex needs when you're already struggling.	This could be: • A shared calendar reminder • A text message or emoji • A colour-coded system • A phrase that signals you may need additional support
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Create a pause plan for big decisions

PMDD can affect mood, thoughts and decision-making. During difficult days, it can be tempting to make significant decisions, end relationships, quit jobs or make impulsive purchases. Journaling can provide a safe space to process emotions while creating distance between thoughts and actions.	Consider creating a personal "pause plan": • Wait 24-72 hours before making major decisions • Write thoughts down before acting on them • Discuss decisions with a trusted person • Revisit the situation when symptoms have eased
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Manage stress with tools that work for you

Stress during the luteal phase can amplify your symptoms. Try these stress-busting techniques: • Deep breathing exercises: <i>Take 5 minutes to breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 4, and exhale for 4.</i> • Use a diffuser with calming essential oils like lavender or chamomile. • Engage in creative outlets: <i>Painting, knitting, or even colouring can be incredibly soothing.</i>
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Write a letter to your luteal self

During your follicular phase, write a letter to yourself that you can revisit during luteal.

Sometimes hearing from a version of yourself who isn't experiencing PMDD can provide reassurance and perspective during difficult moments.

Include reminders of:

- What you're experiencing is temporary
- Symptoms often feel bigger and more permanent than they are
- Things that have helped you before
- Reasons to stay hopeful
- Kind words you might struggle to believe when symptoms are high

Reach out for support

You don't have to do this alone.

Share your experience with a loved one, PMDD community, or therapist.

Having someone to talk to can help lighten the load.

Prepare a luteal phase box

Fill a box with things that may help.

Such as affirmations, self-care products, bath salts, a stress ball, noise-cancelling headphones, etc.

Prioritise rest & recovery

During the luteal phase, your body needs extra care.

Quality sleep is essential, and if you're struggling with insomnia or disrupted rest:

Create a calm bedtime routine: Dim the lights, unplug from screens, and maybe try a warm bath or light reading before bed.

Practice mindfulness or meditation to help calm racing thoughts. Apps like Calm or Headspace have quick and easy guides to get you started.

Review your toolkit regularly

PMDD symptoms, circumstances and support needs can change over time.

What worked six months ago may not work now, and that's okay.

Consider reviewing your toolkit each month and allow for your toolkit to evolve alongside you. There is no perfect formula - only finding what works best for your individual experience.

Move with compassion

Physical activity might feel like the last thing you want to do, but gentle movement can make a huge difference.

Exercise increases endorphins, the "feel-good" chemicals in your brain, which can help ease mood swings.

Research suggests that regular movement may help reduce pain, fatigue and emotional symptoms associated with premenstrual disorders.

- **Activities such as walking, stretching, yoga, swimming or gentle stretch** training can be adapted to suit your energy levels of symptoms.
- **Create your own list of activities** that feel supportive and realistic during luteal, so you don't have to decide in the moment.

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.



References available upon request.

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