



Sleep & PMDD

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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Sleep disturbances are common for those with Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) and can have a significant impact on mood, concentration, energy levels and overall wellbeing^(1, 2).

Many people with PMDD notice changes in their sleep during the luteal phase (*the two weeks before a period begins*).

Research suggests that around **70% of individuals with PMDD** experience sleep difficulties during this time^(1, 2).

These difficulties may include:

- Struggling to fall asleep;
- Waking frequently throughout the night;
- Feeling unrefreshed despite getting enough sleep;
- Increased daytime fatigue;
- Difficulty concentrating and maintaining focus;
- Night terrors;
- Night sweats

This guide provides practical tips for better sleep and a suggested bedtime routine to support restful sleep during your luteal phase.



Why does *PMDD* affect sleep?

Researchers are still working to fully understand the relationship between PMDD and sleep, but several biological mechanisms have been identified.

Hormonal changes

PMDD symptoms are triggered by the body's response to normal hormonal changes across the menstrual cycle.

During the luteal phase, fluctuations in progesterone and allopregnanolone can affect brain systems involved in mood regulation, stress responses, and sleep^(2,3).

Changes to the body's internal clock

Emerging research suggests PMDD may involve disruptions to circadian rhythms - the body's internal timing system that regulates sleep, hormone release, body temperature and alertness⁽⁴⁾.

People with PMDD may be more sensitive to disruptions in these biological rhythms, which can contribute to sleep difficulties and mood symptoms during the luteal phase^(4,5).

Melatonin and sleep timing

Melatonin is a hormone that helps regulate the sleep-wake cycle. Some studies suggest people with PMDD may experience differences in melatonin production and timing, particularly during the luteal phase, which may contribute to sleep disturbances^(4,6).

Why am I tired even when I've slept?

Research has found that people with PMDD can experience significant fatigue and poor sleep quality even when objective sleep measures appear relatively normal^(1, 7).

This means that feeling exhausted or unrefreshed after a full night's sleep is a recognised part of PMDD and not simply a sign that you aren't getting enough sleep.

Why is *sleep important* for PMDD?

Improving sleep won't cure PMDD, but it may help reduce symptom severity and improve daily functioning⁽⁸⁾.

Better sleep may help:

- Improve concentration and attention⁽³⁾
- Reduce fatigue⁽³⁾
- Support emotional regulation and mood stability⁽⁷⁾
- Promote overall wellbeing and resilience throughout the menstrual cycle⁽⁹⁾

From a sleep science point of view, there are three main things that affect how well we sleep:

Sleep drive

This builds up while you're awake and helps you feel sleepy at night⁽¹⁾

Your body clock (circadian rhythm)

This is controlled mainly by light and darkness and helps time when you feel awake or sleepy⁽²⁾

How alert your nervous system is

When the brain and body feel too stimulated, sleep becomes harder⁽³⁾

In PMDD, sleep problems may be partly linked to changes in melatonin (*the hormone released in darkness that helps signal night-time to the body*), which can be lower in the luteal phase⁽⁴⁾.

In people who are also neurodivergent, melatonin release can also be delayed⁽⁵⁾, making it harder to fall asleep.

This means PMDD and neurodiversity together can sometimes make sleep even more challenging.

Supporting better sleep with PMDD

Create a relaxing sleep environment

Your bedroom should be a calm, comfortable space.

Try to keep it cool, dark and quiet. Blackout curtains, earplugs or a white noise machine can help block out distractions, and comfortable bedding can make your bed feel more inviting.

Keep the room clean & clutter-free

A busy or messy environment can increase mental stimulation and make it harder to relax, and dust and allergens can also disrupt sleep for some people.

If you work from home, try not to use your bedroom as your workplace.

Keeping the bedroom just for sleep helps your brain associate it with rest rather than stress.

If you experience night sweats...

Lighter layers and natural bedding (like cotton or bamboo) can help with temperature control.

A fan, a cool drink by the bed, or a cool cloth on the back of your neck if you wake up overheated can make it easier to settle again.

Maintain a consistent sleep schedule

Keeping a regular sleep-wake schedule helps support your body's internal clock.

Try to:

- Go to bed at a similar time each night
- Wake up at a similar time each morning
- Creating a calming wind-down routine
- Keep your bedroom dark, cool, and comfortable^(4, 10)

Create a gentle wind-down routine

Just like babies, our nervous systems respond really well to routines.

Having a calming evening wind-down helps your body and mind shift out of “alert mode” and into “rest mode”.



This might include things like:

- Gentle stretching or yoga
- Breathing exercises
- A warm shower or bath
- Reading, journaling or listening to something soothing
- A guided sleep meditation (apps like Headspace or Calm can be helpful)

Get daylight in the morning

Getting outside or into bright natural light within about 30 minutes of waking helps set your body clock for the day. This helps your body know when to start producing melatonin later in the evening.

Regular daylight exposure, along with things like meals, social time and movement, helps keep your sleep-wake cycle in sync.

Get moving during the day

Regular movement has been associated with improvements in sleep, mood and fatigue symptoms.

Choose activities that feel manageable and enjoyable for you, such as walking, yoga, swimming, or strength training^(3,11).

Consider your caffeine intake

Caffeine can remain in the body for several hours and may interfere with sleep.

If you notice sleep difficulties, consider reducing caffeine intake later in the day and monitoring whether this improves your sleep quality.

Eating before bed

Large, heavy meals close to bedtime can disrupt sleep, so try to finish eating a couple of hours before bed.

If you do need a snack, something small and gentle is best.

Pairing a carbohydrate with some protein (*like toast with nut butter or yoghurt with fruit*) can help keep blood sugar more stable overnight, which may reduce night-time waking⁽⁶⁾.

Screens and sleep

Screens can interfere with sleep, but it's not just about blue light.

What really matters is how bright the screen is and how mentally stimulating the content is. Scrolling, messaging, or watching something intense can keep your brain alert when it should be winding down.

If you do use screens in the evening, try to keep the brightness low and avoid content that feels stressful or activating.

One small but important tip:

If you wake up in the night, try not to check the clock. Our brains love patterns, and clock-watching can train your body to wake at the same time every night.

Naps

If you need to nap, **keeping them to 20-30 minutes and before 3pm** is least likely to interfere with night-time sleep.

If you really need a **longer rest, aim for around 90 minutes, which is roughly one full sleep cycle** and can help you wake feeling less groggy.

Seek additional support if needed

If sleep difficulties are persistent or significantly affecting your quality of life, speaking with a healthcare professional.

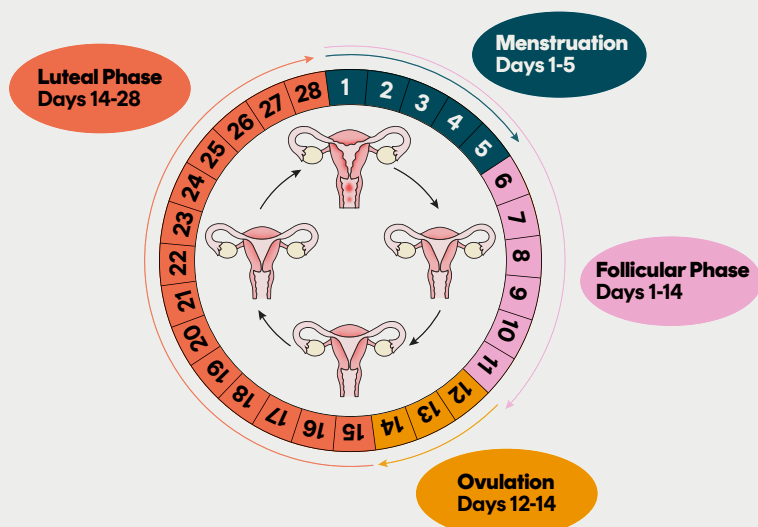
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) is recommended as a first-line treatment for chronic insomnia and may help individuals experiencing ongoing sleep difficulties^(12, 13).

Healthcare professionals can also discuss evidence-based PMDD treatment options, including SSRIs and hormonal treatments where appropriate.

Sync Your Sleep with Your Cycle

Just as exercise can be aligned with your cycle, so can your sleep habits.

Understanding how each phase affects your body's need for rest can help you adapt your sleep routine:



Menstrual Phase (Days 1-5*):

During menstruation, fatigue is common.

Prioritise longer sleep if possible, and give yourself permission to nap if needed.

Opt for early nights, and don't be afraid to rest as much as your body needs.

Follicular Phase (Days 6-14*):

After menstruation, energy levels often start to rise.

This can be a time when you might need slightly less sleep, but it's still important to maintain a regular bedtime to prevent overexertion.

Ovulation Phase (Days 14-17*):

During ovulation, you may feel more alert and energised, making it easier to stay up late. Try to stick to your regular bedtime routine and avoid the temptation to cut back on sleep, even if you're feeling more awake.

Luteal Phase (Days 18-28*):

This is when PMDD symptoms often intensify. You may find it harder to fall asleep or stay asleep. Prioritise sleep during this phase by sticking to a calming bedtime routine and creating a sleep-friendly environment. Consider adding a 20-30 minute nap during the day if night time sleep is disrupted.

Remember:

Sleep difficulties are a recognised and common part of PMDD.

While improving sleep may not eliminate symptoms entirely, prioritising rest and establishing supportive sleep habits may help reduce symptom severity and improve quality of life.

If you are struggling with severe sleep difficulties, seek advice from a healthcare professional who can help identify appropriate support and treatment options.

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Further reading

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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.

