

Why You Should Eat More *chocolate* before your period



To fully understand just why you should eat more chocolate before you period, it's helpful to understand the physiology of the female cycle.

The female menstrual cycle is a truly fascinating thing. You may liken it to the changing seasons of nature--that is, each season has its place and each does its work to ensure a healthy planet full of abundance and balance.

Similarly, each phase of a woman's cycle is different from the other and has an important job to do to ensure a healthy and balanced reproductive system.

The female cycle is just that, a cyclical, circular "body program," if you will, that keeps going until a

woman hits menopause. (Even in menopause, a woman has body cycles, but we'll address that in a different article.) There are three stages (four if you count ovulation as its own stage) in a full cycle. I don't necessarily consider the cycle as "starting" in any one of these stages, because it's a circle, but we'll go ahead and start with the Follicular Phase.

The Follicular Phase is the phase in which your body is preparing to release an egg. The hormone progesterone stays quite level during this phase, while there is a sharp spike in estrogen just before the body ovulates. The lining of the endometrium is also forming at this time, preparing for a possible pregnancy.

Just as the follicular phase is ending, the Luteal Phase begins with ovulation, or the release of the egg from the egg follicle on the ovary. Again, ovulation can also be considered its own phase of the female cycle, as mentioned above. During the Luteal Phase, progesterone and estrogen levels continue to rise as the body waits several days to allow for implantation in the uterus of a possible fertilized egg. If this doesn't occur by around day 25, there is a sharp drop in progesterone and estrogen that causes the uterus to shed the lining it has been building up.

This leads to the Menstrual Phase, which, as we all know, is referred to as, "your period."

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This article focuses on that sharp drop in estrogen and progesterone that occurs at the end of the luteal phase and is known as the premenstrual period.

As you know, PMS, or Premenstrual Syndrome, is the name often given to a set of symptoms that accompany that drop in hormones. These include, but are not limited to:

- Bloating
- Breast tenderness
- Weight gain
- Aggression
- Trouble concentrating
- Headaches/backaches
- Food cravings/overeating
- Fatigue
- Tearfulness
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Mood swings and/or depression

What actually constitutes true PMS, though, is when those symptoms are so severe, that they interfere with normal life activities. So when you feel, "PMS-ey" or your friends say they are, "PMS-ing," remember that most likely, you're not experiencing true premenstrual syndrome, rather, you're experiencing the normal signs of those hormone drops.

There are, however, a long list of things you can do to help ease the negative effects of those hormonal fluctuations, and eating more chocolate is one of them.

Take a look at the list of symptoms again. I want to focus largely on the emotional aspects of that list, but also some of the physical ones like headaches and food cravings.

Chocolate, especially the darker variety, is known to contribute to a significant release of endorphins which interact with the opiate receptors in our brains, acting similarly to drugs like codeine and morphine (though endorphins aren't addictive) to reduce our perceptions of pain and also giving us an overall feeling of comfort and reduced stress.

Many people are also aware that **chocolate can increase serotonin, which is known to have a calming effect** on the individual consuming it, but what is less commonly known is that chocolate contains the compounds phenylethylamine and tyramine, both of which have dopamine promoting effects. Dopamine, like serotonin can activate the pleasure centers in the brain, but, according to Georgia Health Sciences University and Tracey Roizman, Nutritional Biochemist, these compounds can also promote "heightened motivation" and "blissful emotions," two things I definitely want to feel more of before my period.

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Minerals are also known to be “leached” from our bodies during times of stress and many women describe the days before their periods as stressful, since the body’s ability to deal with difficult events can often be lessened. Some women also get what they call, “hormonal headaches” that occur during these same days. Both phosphorous and potassium, manganese, and significantly magnesium, have all been shown to be helpful in reducing the headaches and stress that can be associated with the premenstrual days.

Additionally, **chocolate can curb the food cravings and overeating associated with premenstrual phase**, precisely because it’s one of the most craved foods during this time. By allowing yourself to indulge a little each day, the guilt and shame associated with doing something previously perceived as bad for you, is eradicated. Our bodies are smart and we generally crave things for a reason: salty foods for electrolyte balance, fatty foods for less brain fog, and chocolate for its high levels of minerals and mood-enhancing properties. If you can feed those cravings with foods that nourish the body in a positive way, as good quality chocolate can, negative food cravings vanish.

Now, before you go out and buy a couple cases of chocolate bars, take note that **too much chocolate can actually cause prolonged depression**. As with everything, **balance is the answer**. Most research shows that eating just 1 to

2 oz a day is beneficial, especially when that chocolate is made with natural sugars and other good quality ingredients. That translates to about 50 chocolate chips (1 oz.) or ½ (1 oz.) of an average chocolate bar. But take note than in the days before my period, I plan on eating twice that.

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