

Why women should choose their diet carefully

GOOD LIVING

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We admire respect and love our female half of the, population. We respect them even more when they beat tens of world-famous nominees to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

And we congratulate all of them for tirelessly leading the way when we falter.

Every month, some individuals in this significant segment of our population lose between 25ml and 80ml of blood in a 2-8 day period. This period is accompanied by severe colic, which may come prior to or during menstruation.

This lunar phenomena is also accompanied by other undesirable side-effects such as nausea, headache, feelings of anxiety, cramps, poor concentration, backache, irrational behaviour, and breast tenderness.

Where a monthly period takes longer than eight days and the flow exceeds 100ml, it is recommended that a doctor be consulted as there may be underlying causes, such as pelvic inflammatory disease, fibroids, pregnancy, ovarian abnormalities, hormonal changes, uterine tumours, arterial hypertension and/or blood coagulation disorders.

A monthly cycle begins from the first day of one cycle and goes on to the first day of the following cycle. Symptoms of premenstrual tension, which begin from the tenth to the fourteenth day before menses are caused by high levels of oestrogen and its tendency to cause fluid retention in cells and tissues.

By paying careful attention to one's choice of foods, some of the problems associated with menstrual pains and the cramps can be alleviated.

One of the ways of minimising this problem is by avoiding excessive use of salt. Salt worsens fluid retention in the brain cells, increasing irritability, depression, emotional instability and headaches.

Fruits and vegetables are highly recommended as they have high levels of potassium, a mineral useful for reducing arterial hypertension.

Potassium is present in sufficient quantities in bananas, citrus fruits, and green leafy vegetables. Vitamin b6 (pyridoxine) also helps in countering premenstrual depression, lethargy and water retention.

Soya contains phytoestrogens, which are plant based female hormones with similar effects to oestrogen but without their undesirable side effects.

Cassidy et al in 1994 in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition showed that Soya helps to regulate the menstrual cycle in premenstrual women.

Diuretic foods can also reduce fluid retention and the intensity of the premenstrual syndrome as they stimulate kidney function and urine production.

Because their effect is less intense



than that of diuretic (urine producing) medication, they can be used everyday without the risk of side effects. Celery, egg plant, melon, loquat, peas, grapes, apples, peaches, asparagus and cauliflower are some of the green leafy vegetables and fruits that can increase urine output due to their low sodium and high potassium content.

Increasing your daily intake of fibre, present in foods such as mukimo (a traditional dish made from potatoes, greens and maize all mashed together) prevents abdominal pain, bloating and constipation, discomforts which result from increased oestrogen levels.

Barr.S.I. et al confirmed this in 1994. In a study carried out at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, he found that vegetarian women had fewer ovulation problems than their omnivorous counterparts. I suppose this was reason enough for our grandmothers to be discouraged from excessive

carnivorous tendencies. A deficiency of magnesium, a mineral necessary for muscle relaxation can lead to cramping. Magnesium is present in wheat bran, wheat germ, nuts and legumes.

Cashew nuts are the richest single source of Magnesium and it is therefore advisable to chew a few each day. Whole grain chapattis also contain this mineral in abundance.

Oranges and citrus fruits are rich in flavonoids such as rutin, which has been known to be effective in prevention of dysmenorrhea, the severe lower abdominal pains experienced by many women during menstruation.

Medical conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and thyroid problems as well as emotional upheavals have also been known to cause irregular periods

Excess cholesterol clogs the arteries and since menstruation involves arterial constrictions to cut supply to the endometrium and subsequent control of bleeding by the formation of clots, healthy arteries are absolutely vital.

Women should thus avoid cholesterol rich foods. Sugar rich foods and drinks as well as stimulants such as coffee which constrict the arteries, should be reduced or eliminated totally from the diet.

Where there is excessive flow, iron rich foods and supplements are recommended.

By following these simple tips our mothers and sisters can have easier and fewer bad days, and we can look forward to an increased number of Nobel Peace Prize winnings from them.

