



Mental Health Awareness Week

THIS WEEK, THE LONDON & SOUTH EAST
REGIONAL TEAM ARE TALKING ALL THINGS
MENTAL HEALTH, BOTH ON AND OFF THE
COURT.

Premenstrual Syndrome and Exercise

Getting to know good old Aunt Flo

A visit from Aunt Flo. The painters are in. That time of the month. Moon time. Red badge of courage...We've got every name for it under the sun, yet so many of us are reluctant to talk about it. That's right folks, I'm talking Periods. More specifically, Premenstrual Syndrome.

Chances are, most women know exactly what I'm talking about, as a staggering 90% of women experience at least 1 symptom before their monthly cycle according to Bupa (1). There are lots of us, myself included, whose symptoms can be overwhelming and drastically affect our mental health. Every. Single. Month. I believe PMS is rather misunderstood and humorously generalised - you'll often hear people making digs about 'that time of the month' and glossing over the severity of the symptoms when actually it's a serious issue that affects roughly half of the population!

There's a huge array of symptoms that PMS can cause, ranging from mood swings and headaches to bloating and anxiety, and it can often be tricky to navigate your way through them to come out the other side. For those who also suffer from mental ill-health, PMS can often compound the issue and exacerbate some already difficult conditions. One of the biggest symptoms I face each month because of PMS is a sense of hopelessness and great sadness, something that will often take over my head completely and really throw me off of my game. It would take over my life so dramatically that I would find myself crying at quite literally anything - and I mean anything. If something made me jump, I would cry. If I ran out of bread, I would cry. If my cat didn't sit on my lap for cuddles, well you can probably guess what happened next.

People will often try to help with a “it’s only temporary, chin up!”, or a “just think of the good stuff”, which might work for some people, but for me it’s a bit of an irritant. It can be difficult to look at the bigger picture in the moment and remind yourself that this will pass when the symptoms can be so powerful, so finding the thing that works for you to help ease the symptoms is key to getting you through the month.

For me and a significant number of other women, sport and exercise can be a tool to not only help ease the symptoms, but provide you with a greater goal to steer you through the darker days. A study in the Journal of Education and Health Promotion found people who exercised 3 days a week for at least 30 minutes for an 8 week time frame had less menstrual pain than those who did not. But as well as easing pain, exercise releases endorphins which also triggers a positive feeling within the body. I’ve found through my own personal experience that the more regularly I exercise throughout the month, be it Netball, running, or weight training (my top 3 exercise activities), the less severe my PMS will be that month. It can sometimes be difficult to exercise regularly and I’ll often struggle to find the motivation to get my trainers on, but making a conscious effort to remind yourself of the benefits (rather than empty platitudes) can really help. I’ve found that the more you exercise, the more you’ll **want** to exercise. Setting myself physical goals such as weight loss, timed distance running, or activities like Tough Mudder has helped to keep me on course when my PMS symptoms really hit, and although I may have to take it easy during the week of my period itself and restrict myself to lower-impact activities such as walking, having that overarching goal gives me something to work towards when the cloud has lifted and normality resumes.

The key thing to remember is to **be kind to your mind**, particularly the week prior to and the week of your period. It may be a bit of a taboo subject still even in today’s society, however being open and honest with your partner, family, friends or colleagues about what

you're going through can really help – I bet you'll be surprised at the number of women who can relate! The only way others are able to help you is if they know how you're feeling. So if you feel like you're able to, speak up and let others know how you're doing, and together we can help support one another through the more difficult days.

(1) www.bupa.co.uk/health-information/womens-health/pre-menstrual-syndrome