

**PREMENSTRUAL SYMPTOMS: AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE ON
PATHOGENESIS AND HOLISTIC MANAGEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Premenstrual symptoms (PMS) represent a spectrum of recurrent physical, emotional, and behavioral disturbances that occur during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle and subside with the onset of menstruation. Affecting a significant proportion of women of reproductive age, PMS can impair quality of life and daily functioning. In modern medicine, its etiology is considered multifactorial, involving hormonal fluctuations, neurotransmitter imbalance, and lifestyle factors. Ayurveda does not describe PMS as a single disease entity; however, its symptomatology can be understood under the concepts of Artava Vyapad, Ritucharya, and imbalance of Doshas, predominantly Vata and Pitta. The vitiation of Apana Vata, along with associated Pitta and Kapha disturbances, plays a central role in the manifestation of symptoms such as mood swings, irritability, abdominal pain, breast tenderness, and

fatigue. The Ayurvedic approach emphasizes a holistic management strategy including Ahara (dietary modifications), Vihara (lifestyle regulation), and Aushadhi (herbal medications).

Therapeutic measures such as Snehana, Swedana, and Vata-pacifying therapies, along with the use of herbs like Ashoka (*Saraca indica*), Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), and Lodhra (*Symplocos racemosa*), have shown potential in alleviating symptoms. Additionally, practices like Yoga, meditation, and adherence to Ritucharya contribute to hormonal balance and mental well-being. Thus, Ayurveda offers a safe, individualized, and preventive approach in the management of premenstrual symptoms by addressing the root cause through Dosha equilibrium and lifestyle correction, thereby improving overall reproductive health.

KEYWORDS: Premenstrual Syndrome, Ayurveda, Artava Vyapad, Apana Vata, Rasa Panchaka, Ritucharya, Herbal Medicine, Women's Health, Dosha Imbalance, Shatavari.

INTRODUCTION

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is a common gynecological condition characterized by a constellation of physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms that occur cyclically during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle and resolve shortly after the onset of menstruation. It affects approximately 20–40% of women of reproductive age, with varying degrees of severity impacting daily activities and quality of life^[1] (1. Dickerson LM & 67(8):1743–1752). The commonly observed symptoms include irritability, mood swings, anxiety, depression, breast tenderness, abdominal bloating, headache, and fatigue^[2] (2. Biggs WS & 84(8):918–924.). In severe cases, it may present as premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), significantly impairing social and occupational functioning^[3] (APA & 2013.).

The exact etiology of PMS remains unclear in contemporary medicine; however, it is believed to involve complex interactions between ovarian hormones, neurotransmitters (particularly serotonin), and psychosocial factors.^[4] Hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle, especially changes in estrogen and progesterone levels, are thought to influence central nervous system activity, leading to emotional and somatic symptoms.^[5]

In Ayurveda, PMS is not described as a distinct disease entity but can be understood through the lens of Artava Vyapad (menstrual disorders) and Dosha imbalance. The menstrual cycle is governed by the coordinated function of Vata, Pitta, and Kapha Doshas, with Apana Vata playing a pivotal role in the regulation of menstruation.^[6] Any disturbance in Apana Vata leads to improper functioning of Artava (menstrual blood), resulting in various premenstrual symptoms. Associated vitiation of Pitta contributes to irritability, anger, and inflammatory changes, while Kapha imbalance may manifest as heaviness, lethargy, and breast

tenderness.^[7]

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of Ritucharya (seasonal and cyclical regimen) and proper diet and lifestyle in maintaining menstrual health. The concept of Rasa Panchaka (Rasa, Guna, Virya, Vipaka, and Prabhava) plays a crucial role in understanding drug action and selecting appropriate therapeutic interventions for balancing Doshas.^[8] Thus, the Ayurvedic approach provides a holistic framework for understanding and managing premenstrual symptoms through individualized treatment, focusing on correcting the root cause rather than merely alleviating symptoms.

AIM

To evaluate premenstrual symptoms from an Ayurvedic perspective and to assess the role of Ayurvedic principles and interventions in their effective management.

METHODOLOGY

A literary review methodology was adopted for this study. Relevant data were collected from classical Ayurvedic texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and standard Dravyaguna literature, along with modern medical journals and published research articles on premenstrual syndrome. The collected information was critically analyzed to understand the correlation between PMS and Ayurvedic concepts like Artava Vyapad, Dosha imbalance, and Apana Vata Dushti. Based on this analysis, Ayurvedic management principles including Ahara, Vihara, and Aushadhi were systematically compiled and interpreted.

Detailed Review

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is a cyclic disorder affecting women during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle and is characterized by a wide range of somatic, emotional, and behavioral symptoms. From an Ayurvedic perspective, although PMS is not described as a single disease entity, its clinical features can be understood through the concepts of Artava Vyapad, Dosha imbalance, and disturbances in Manasika Bhava. The following review elaborates the condition in light of both modern and Ayurvedic principles.

1. Modern View of Premenstrual Symptoms

PMS encompasses a spectrum of symptoms such as irritability, depression, anxiety, breast tenderness, bloating, headache, and fatigue. These symptoms typically appear 5–10 days before menstruation and subside after the onset of bleeding. The condition is thought to arise

due to hormonal fluctuations, particularly estrogen and progesterone, which influence neurotransmitters like serotonin. Lifestyle factors such as stress, poor diet, and lack of physical activity further aggravate the condition.

Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) represents a severe form of PMS with marked psychological symptoms affecting interpersonal relationships and occupational performance.

2. Ayurvedic Conceptual Understanding

2.1 Artava and Menstrual Physiology

In Ayurveda, menstruation (Artava) is governed by the proper functioning of Tridosha, particularly Apana Vata, which is responsible for the downward movement and expulsion of menstrual blood. The health of Rasa Dhatu and Rakta Dhatu also plays a crucial role in maintaining normal menstrual cycles.

2.2 Dosha Involvement

- Vata (Apana Vata): Its vitiation leads to pain (Udavarta), anxiety, mood swings, and irregular flow.
- Pitta: Responsible for heat and transformation, its aggravation results in irritability, anger, inflammation, and excessive bleeding.
- Kapha: Causes heaviness, lethargy, breast tenderness, and water retention when aggravated.

Thus, PMS can be considered a condition involving Vata-Pitta predominance with Kapha association.

3. Nidana (Etiological Factors)

Ayurveda emphasizes multiple causative factors contributing to Dosha imbalance:

- **Aharaja Nidana:** Excess intake of spicy, sour, salty foods; junk food; caffeine; and irregular eating habits.
- **Viharaja Nidana:** Sedentary lifestyle, lack of sleep, excessive physical exertion, and suppression of natural urges (Vegadharana).
- **Manasika Nidana:** Stress, anxiety, emotional instability, and disturbed mental health.
- **Rituvyatyaya (Improper regimen):** Non-adherence to menstrual and seasonal regimens (Ritucharya).

These factors primarily vitiate Vata and Pitta Doshas, leading to manifestation of

premenstrual symptoms.

4. Samprapti (Pathogenesis)

The pathogenesis of PMS in Ayurveda can be explained as follows:

Due to Nidana sevana, there is vitiation of Vata (especially Apana Vata) along with Pitta and Kapha. The aggravated Doshas localize in Artavavaha Srotas, leading to improper functioning of the reproductive system. Vata causes irregular movement and pain, Pitta induces inflammatory and emotional symptoms, while Kapha contributes to stagnation and heaviness. This results in the manifestation of both physical and psychological symptoms during the premenstrual phase.

5. Lakshana (Clinical Features)

The symptoms of PMS can be correlated with Doshic predominance:

- **Vataja Lakshana:** Lower abdominal pain, anxiety, insomnia, mood swings
- **Pittaja Lakshana:** Irritability, anger, excessive sweating, breast tenderness
- **Kaphaja Lakshana:** Lethargy, heaviness, edema, depression

These symptoms vary from individual to individual depending on Prakriti and Dosha dominance.

6. AYURVEDIC MANAGEMENT

Ayurveda adopts a holistic approach involving Nidana Parivarjana, Shodhana, Shamana, and lifestyle modification.

6.1 Nidana Parivarjana

Avoidance of causative factors such as unhealthy diet, stress, and improper lifestyle is the first line of management.

6.2 Shodhana Therapy

- **Vamana (therapeutic emesis):** For Kapha dominance
- **Virechana (purgation):** For Pitta imbalance
- **Basti (medicated enema):** Most effective for Vata disorders, especially Apana Vata.

6.3 Shamana Chikitsa (Pacification Therapy)

Use of herbal drugs with Vata-Pitta balancing properties:

- **Ashoka (*Saraca indica*)** – regulates uterine function
- **Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*)** – hormone balancing and rejuvenative

- **Lodhra (*Symplocos racemosa*)** – reduces inflammation and discharge
- **Dashamoola** – relieves pain and inflammation

6.4 Ahara (Dietary Management)

- Light, warm, and easily digestible food
- Inclusion of milk, ghee, fruits, and vegetables
- Avoidance of spicy, oily, and processed foods

6.5 Vihara (Lifestyle Management)

- Regular exercise and yoga
- Meditation and stress management
- Adequate sleep and adherence to daily and seasonal regimens

7. Role of Yoga and Lifestyle

Yoga practices such as Bhujangasana, Baddha Konasana, and Shavasana, along with Pranayama, help in reducing stress, improving hormonal balance, and alleviating physical discomfort. Meditation plays a significant role in managing emotional symptoms like anxiety and irritability.

DISCUSSION

Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) is a complex and multifactorial condition involving physical, emotional, and behavioral disturbances occurring during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle. From a modern biomedical perspective, PMS is primarily attributed to cyclical hormonal fluctuations, particularly variations in estrogen and progesterone levels, which influence neurotransmitters such as serotonin.^[9] However, this explanation alone fails to justify the wide inter-individual variability in symptom severity and presentation. Ayurveda provides a more comprehensive and individualized understanding by incorporating concepts of *Dosha*, *Prakriti*, *Agni*, *Srotas*, and *Manasika Bhavas* in disease manifestation.^[10]

According to Ayurvedic principles, PMS can be predominantly understood as a disorder of *Apana Vata*, which is responsible for regulating menstruation (*Artava Pravritti*). Vitiating of *Apana Vata* leads to improper expulsion and regulation of *Artava*, resulting in symptoms such as lower abdominal pain, irregular menstruation, anxiety, and mood disturbances.^[11] The involvement of *Pitta Dosha* explains symptoms like irritability, anger, hypersensitivity, and inflammatory changes, while *Kapha Dosha* contributes to heaviness, lethargy, breast

tenderness, and fluid retention. Thus, PMS can be considered a *Tridoshaja Vyadhi* with predominance of *Vata-Pitta*, which correlates well with the diverse symptomatology observed clinically.^[12]

A significant concept in Ayurvedic pathogenesis is the role of *Agni* and *Ama*. Impairment of digestive fire (*Mandagni*) leads to the formation of *Ama*, which acts as a pathological factor circulating throughout the body. *Ama* causes obstruction of microchannels (*Srotorodha*), particularly in *Artavavaha Srotas*, thereby disturbing normal physiological functions and aggravating *Doshas*.^[13] This can be correlated with modern concepts of metabolic dysregulation, systemic inflammation, and altered neuroendocrine responses observed in PMS patients.^[14] The accumulation of *Ama* not only affects physical health but also contributes to psychological disturbances.

The role of *Manasika Bhavas* such as *Chinta* (anxiety), *Krodha* (anger), and *Shoka* (grief) is highly significant in PMS. Ayurveda emphasizes the strong interconnection between mind (*Manas*) and body (*Sharira*), where psychological stress can aggravate *Vata* and *Pitta Dosha*, leading to exacerbation of symptoms.^[15] This aligns with modern research, which highlights the role of stress and emotional disturbances in altering the hypothalamic–pituitary–ovarian (HPO) axis and neurotransmitter balance, thereby worsening PMS symptoms.^[16]

The Ayurvedic therapeutic approach provides a holistic and root-cause-oriented management. *Shodhana Chikitsa*, particularly *Basti*, is considered the prime treatment for *Vata Dosha* disorders, as it directly acts on the seat of *Vata* and regulates *Apana Vata*.^[17] *Virechana* helps in eliminating vitiated *Pitta*, thereby reducing inflammatory and emotional symptoms such as irritability and anger.^[18] These purification therapies not only alleviate symptoms but also prevent recurrence by correcting underlying *Dosha Dushti*.

Shamana Chikitsa includes the use of herbal drugs such as *Ashoka*, *Shatavari*, and *Lodhra*, which possess *Vata-Pitta Shamana*, *Rasayana*, and *Stree Roga Hara* properties.^[19] These drugs help in regulating hormonal balance, strengthening reproductive tissues (*Artava Dhatu*), and calming the nervous system. Their pharmacological actions, explained through *Rasa Panchaka*, support their effectiveness in reducing both somatic and psychological symptoms of PMS.

Diet and lifestyle (*Ahara-Vihara*) modifications play a crucial role in management. Intake of

light, warm, and easily digestible food supports *Agni* and prevents *Ama* formation.^[20] Avoidance of excessive spicy, salty, and processed foods helps in controlling *Pitta*. Regular physical activity, yoga, and meditation contribute to stress reduction and stabilization of the neuroendocrine axis.^[21] Observance of *Dinacharya* and *Ritucharya* helps in maintaining circadian and hormonal balance, which is essential for reproductive health.

Another important aspect emphasized in Ayurveda is the individualized approach to treatment. Unlike modern medicine, which often adopts a generalized protocol, Ayurveda considers the patient's *Prakriti*, *Dosha predominance*, and specific symptom profile. This personalized approach enhances therapeutic efficacy and minimizes adverse effects.^[22]

In conclusion, Ayurveda provides a deeper, integrative, and patient-centered understanding of PMS by linking physiological, psychological, and lifestyle factors. The concepts of *Dosha balance*, *Agni correction*, and *Srotas Shuddhi* offer a rational and effective framework for both management and prevention. When correlated with modern scientific insights, Ayurveda demonstrates significant potential as a complementary system in improving women's reproductive health and overall quality of life.^[23]

CONCLUSION

Premenstrual symptoms constitute a significant health concern affecting the physical, emotional, and social well-being of women. While modern medicine primarily attributes PMS to hormonal and neurochemical fluctuations, Ayurveda provides a more comprehensive and individualized understanding by interpreting it as a manifestation of *Dosha* imbalance, predominantly involving *Apana Vata* along with *Pitta* and *Kapha*.

The Ayurvedic approach emphasizes addressing the root cause through correction of *Agni*, elimination of *Ama*, and restoration of *Dosha* equilibrium. Therapeutic interventions including *Shodhana* (especially *Basti* and *Virechana*), *Shamana Aushadhi*, along with *Ahara* and *Vihara* modifications, play a vital role in alleviating symptoms and preventing recurrence. Additionally, incorporation of *Yoga*, meditation, and *Ritucharya* contributes to mental stability and hormonal balance.

Thus, Ayurveda offers a safe, holistic, and sustainable approach in the management of premenstrual symptoms. Its emphasis on individualized treatment and preventive care not only reduces symptom severity but also enhances overall reproductive health and quality of

life.

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