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## Finding a Doctor to Treat Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder

It can be very challenging to find a health care provider who is well informed on symptoms, diagnosis and treatment options for Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD). It is not uncommon for a woman to meet with several doctors before finding a provider that is right for her. We have created this document to help you (1) find a clinician to best diagnose and treat you (2) start the conversation with your doctor on PMDD and (3) provide your doctor with the information needed to make an informed diagnosis and treatment plan.

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## Building Your Health Care Team

### When to See Your Doctor

If you suspect your symptoms of depression, hopelessness, anxiety, suicidal ideation, anger, and rage are occurring in correlation with your ovulation cycle; or PMS is severely interfering with your ability to function and maintain employment or interpersonal relationships - it's time to see a doctor.

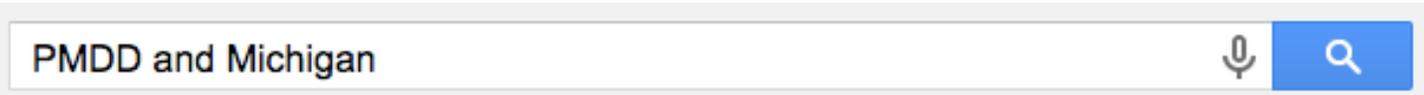
Many practitioners will want to see at least two months of symptom tracking to make a diagnosis of PMDD, however, a woman who is in tune with her ovulation schedule can usually make an accurate conclusion. A woman has the best odds for recovery when she is supported, educated, and empowered by clinical evidence.

If you have already seen a doctor and received a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, yet your symptoms continue or you are not getting relief from treatment, schedule a follow-up visit or get a second opinion.

If you are a woman of reproductive age and your ovaries are intact, strongly consider seeing a doctor trained to care for women with premenstrual and menstrual disorders, a gynecologist, or midwife.

### Google Your Way to a Clinician

Visit [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) and search for PMDD and “your city and/or state” to bring up a list of clinicians in your area who at the very least advertise a general knowledge about Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder. This will help get you started.



## Prescreening Your Providers

Even if you are in an area limited by options, you have the right to screen your clinical care providers to ensure they are able to best treat you. Whether choosing in-network or out of network these are some excellent questions to ask a potential gynecologist or general practitioner.

### Questions to ask at a 1st visit or (if you are able) over the phone or via email:

- ✓ What is your current level of knowledge and understanding of PMDD?
- ✓ How many women with PMDD have you personally treated?
- ✓ Do you believe in a one-size-fits-all approach or an individualized treatment plan?
- ✓ Are you open to the latest research and trying new approaches to treat my PMDD?

### When to know it is time to move on

If a provider is unwilling or unable to treat you and your symptoms with respect, care, and a willingness to make you better; it is completely ok to find a new health care provider. With the many options available in the United States from gynecologists to endocrinologists to naturopathic providers, do not feel obligated or limited to continue with a practice that is not suiting your needs.

**If you feel you are being discriminated against, denied proper treatment, or given treatments that are grossly inappropriate for your condition immediately contact your State Medical Complaint Board.** The contact information for the medical complaint boards of all 50 states can be found at <http://www.checkbook.org/doctors/medicalboard.cfm>.

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## Making the Most of Each Visit

### Starting the conversation

Once you find a provider you like and trust, you'll need to "break the ice" as it were. Here are some general tips for making the most of your doctor appointments.

### What to bring to your appointment:

- ✓ A history of your symptoms and your menstrual cycle like the one provided at <http://giaallemandfoundation.org/tracking-symptoms> or the CLUE app available for smartphones
- ✓ A detailed history of all medications you have tried or are currently trying including vitamin and herbal supplements
- ✓ A list of questions so you don't forget what you wanted to ask
- ✓ Consider bringing a family member, partner, or friend with you to your doctor's appointment. It can help to have another person hear what your doctor says and they can also ask additional questions that you might not have thought of to ask.

## How to ask your doctor about PMDD

The next step in seeking diagnosis and/or treatment is to rule out or include any underlying disorders. This can be done verbally and in minimally invasive ways.

### General questions to ask:

- ✓ There is a history of mental disorder, PMS, Severe PMS, and/or PMDD in my family. Am I at risk?
- ✓ Can you recommend any lifestyle or dietary changes that can help minimize the symptoms I am feeling?
- ✓ Can you recommend a psychotherapist the specializes in women's cognitive health to help me in my treatment plan?
- ✓ Can you refer me to a licensed nutritionist to assist me with living a healthy lifestyle?

### Tests to ask for:

- ✓ Thyroid test (thyroid imbalance and disease can have the same symptoms as PMDD. A simple blood test, usually completed with a complete hormone panel can indicate or rule out a thyroid problem).
- ✓ The Female Hormone Panel™ is a simple, non-invasive test where eleven saliva samples are collected during specified time periods throughout the menstrual cycle. Using this panel the first time in routine medical practice, both patients and doctors can view the profiles of estrogen and progesterone simultaneously.

## If You Are Experiencing Severe Symptoms

Often times women will wait to seek a specialist or medical attention until symptoms become so severe, they are unable to function in any aspect of their every day life.

In addition to the most common symptoms – anxiety, hopelessness, sadness, intense food cravings, and tension – women with more severe PMDD might also experience:

- ✓ Anxiety or Panic Attacks
- ✓ Misophonia (a severe aversion to sounds)
- ✓ Insomnia and/or Excessive Fatigue
- ✓ Emotional Lability (laughing or crying unexpectedly)
- ✓ Excessive Rage or Violent Tendencies
- ✓ Suicidal Ideation or Behaviors

If you are experiencing a PMDD episode and are in need of immediate stabilization, ask your doctor about PRN (or “take as needed”) anti-anxiety medication like Xanax or Valium. Depending on your state laws, medicinal cannabis may be another option to ease these symptoms. Ask your doctor for more information or visit the American Cannabis Nurses Association (ACNA) online at [americancannabisnursesassociation.org](http://americancannabisnursesassociation.org).

For more information and resources call the Gia Allemand Foundation at **1.800.609.PMDD (7633)**.

**A physician letter is on the next page**

Dear Healthcare Provider,

I am seeing you today because I am concerned about worsening symptoms I have been experiencing for more than two to three menstrual cycles. I know that these symptoms can possibly be signs of Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) as well as other problems. I have checked the following symptoms that I am currently experiencing:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Feelings of sadness or despair
- \_\_\_\_\_ Thoughts of suicide
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feelings of tension or anxiety
- \_\_\_\_\_ Panic attacks
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mood swings
- \_\_\_\_\_ Frequent crying
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lasting irritability or anger that affects other people
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of interest in daily activities and relationships
- \_\_\_\_\_ Trouble thinking or focusing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tiredness or low-energy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Food cravings or binge eating
- \_\_\_\_\_ Trouble sleeping
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling out of control
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bloating, breast tenderness, headaches, and joint or muscle pain

It seems I am experiencing these symptoms only during the two weeks before my period and then the symptoms disappear shortly after my period begins.

I am concerned about these symptoms and would like you to consider PMDD as a possible diagnosis. Please add any testing which would help in diagnosing PMDD to tests you may run in order to rule out other problems.

Thank you,

\_\_\_\_\_ (Patient Name)