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Banishing PMS: Pauline Houle's "*My Beauty & My Beast*" *Mind, Body and PMS.*

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Cramps. Irritability. Not wanting to be touched. These are among the 150 symptoms of Premenstrual Syndrome, which affects nearly 2 out of every 5 women. 10% of women have such severe symptoms that it adversely impacts their daily lives.

Medical science has made some progress toward alleviating these symptoms, but an important component in PMS treatment has been overlooked. That's according to Pauline Houle, author of "*My Beauty and My Beast: Mind, Body, and PMS*".

"When I was in my late thirties," Houle explained, "I had severe PMS I'd never had this before." Dissatisfied with the cursory attention given to the condition by her doctor, "I decided to search on my own."

"I firmly believe that if you search, you will find." Houle, a social worker and psychotherapist, examined PMS in the context of her profession.

"It is extremely rare that PMS derives solely from a physical, mechanical reason," she explained. "There is almost always an emotional component. Every thought has a biochemical reaction."

Recognizing and dealing with the thoughts underlying those biochemical reactions is at the core of Houle's approach to PMS.

"You have to look at all the suffering you go through, and then take a look at all the pleasures."

Pleasures? With PMS? Houle says yes.

"Women have a tendency to use PMS as a means to allow themselves those things they don't allow themselves at other times of the month. After all, what's a headache for?"

PMS symptoms grant women a freedom to do things they don't otherwise do – take a nap in the middle of the day, miss a day from work, forgo an unpleasant social obligation.

"When there is an accountability," Houle continued, "When women take ownership of those needs, without guilt, in a comprehensive manner, the symptoms disappear."

She relays this in *"My Beauty and My Beast"* through several case studies. Josette is 28 year old woman who'd had a total absence of menstrual cycles for a year and a half. She is joined by Carmen, whose irregular periods were tied directly to her self-image of a feminine woman, and Elyzabeth, with dramatic symptoms tied to a potential deadly relationship. Houle uses these stories to illustrate the wide variety of reasons women may develop PMS.

"It all comes down to limiting beliefs," she said. *"Many women do not even realize that they have these beliefs, but they have a direct affect on your body."* Limiting beliefs are often learned during a woman's early life, based upon her family dynamics.

In one case study, Francoise recounts a childhood where she was seldom touched – a situation that later manifested as a complete inability to tolerate physical contact during her PMS.

“*You have to understand the old brain and the new brain,*” Houle continued. “*The old brain, the reptilian brain, that is for our survival. It is the part of us that motivates us to eat, sleep, make love.*” The new brain contains all that we’ve learned since birth. Designed to help us adapt, it is still very much influenced by the old brain’s survival drive. “*That is why people will sometimes stay in a bad situation – because it is comfortable. Change – which is thought about by the new brain – can be scary.*” The old brain worries that any change – in relationship, job, or living situation – might threaten survival. “*But you can learn to overcome the old brain’s patterns,*” Houle said. “Then you can witness the old brain being afraid for nothing.”

“*My Beauty and My Beast*” contains several tools designed to teach women the art of asking empowering questions, and what to do with the answer to those questions. Houle is developing a workbook to accompany the 300 page text, and is confident that with these tools, “*Every woman can heal herself.*”

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