

Foods for Period Cramps: Before, During and After

What to eat in each phase, why it works and how to include it

Food can't remove period pain completely, but the right choices can **ease cramps, steady mood, reduce bloating and replace the iron you lose**. This guide covers what to eat in the week before your period, during it and after it ends, with the reason each food helps and simple ways to add it to everyday Indian meals. Evidence is strongest for ginger and omega-3 fats and more modest for magnesium, calcium and B6, so think of food as a helpful support.

1. Nutrition Goals by Phase

What your body needs

Why this matters: Your body needs different things at different points in the cycle. Matching food to the phase can reduce cramps, mood swings and tiredness.

PHASE	WHAT'S HAPPENING	FOOD GOALS
Before your period (about the last week of the cycle)	Hormones drop, which can bring bloating, cravings, mood swings, breast tenderness and the start of cramps.	Steady blood sugar, magnesium, calcium, B6, omega-3 and less salt and sugar.
During your period (days 1 to 5 or so)	The uterus contracts to shed its lining, causing cramps. Prostaglandins drive pain and inflammation, and blood loss lowers iron.	Anti-inflammatory foods, warmth, iron with vitamin C, hydration and easy-to-digest meals.
After your period ends (the week after)	Energy and mood often improve as oestrogen rises. The body needs to rebuild iron and nutrients lost.	Iron, protein, B12, folate, zinc and fibre to restore energy.

2. Before Your Period

Steady mood, less bloating

Why this works: In the week before your period, the goal is to steady mood and energy, reduce bloating and build up nutrients that help ease cramps.

FOOD	WHY IT HELPS	HOW TO INCLUDE IT
Pumpkin seeds, almonds, spinach, banana	Magnesium may help relax muscles and ease cramps, mood swings and bloating. Evidence for PMS is promising but limited.	A handful of seeds or nuts daily, a leafy green dish and a banana as a snack.
Curd, milk, ragi, sesame (til)	Calcium (with vitamin D) has been linked to fewer PMS symptoms such as mood changes and cramps.	Curd with lunch, ragi dosa or porridge, til chutney or a small til laddu.
Banana, chickpeas, potato, fish, chicken	Vitamin B6 supports the production of calming brain chemicals like serotonin, and may ease mood symptoms.	Sundal or chana chaat, a banana, fish curry or grilled chicken.
Oats, ragi, millets, brown rice, sweet potato	Complex carbs give steady energy and help serotonin, which reduces cravings and low mood.	Oats or ragi for breakfast, millet roti, boiled sweet potato.
Walnuts, flaxseeds, chia, fatty fish	Omega-3 fats reduce inflammation, and may reduce the strength of cramps.	4 to 5 walnuts, a spoon of ground flax or chia in curd, fish twice a week.
Cucumber, watermelon, coconut water, plenty of water	Hydration reduces water-retention bloating and headaches.	Salad with lunch, coconut water in the afternoon, a full water bottle.

FOOD	WHY IT HELPS	HOW TO INCLUDE IT
Fruits, vegetables and dal for fibre	Fibre helps hormone clearance, regular bowels and steady sugar.	Vegetables in each meal, fruit as snacks.

3. During Your Period

Calm cramps, replace iron

Why this works: During your period, aim to calm cramps and replace the iron you lose. Warm, light and nourishing foods are usually best.

FOOD	WHY IT HELPS	HOW TO INCLUDE IT
Ginger tea	Ginger has the strongest evidence of this group: several studies show it can reduce period pain, comparable to some pain relievers in mild to moderate cases.	A cup of ginger tea (2 slices, steeped 10 minutes) 2 to 3 times a day. Avoid very large amounts.
Fennel (saunf) tea or water	Traditionally used for cramps. Small studies suggest it may help with period pain by relaxing smooth muscle.	1 tsp crushed saunf steeped in hot water, sipped warm.
Fish, flaxseeds, walnuts	Omega-3 fats lower prostaglandins, the chemicals that drive cramps.	Fish curry, ground flax in curd or rotis, walnuts as a snack.
Spinach, beetroot, dates, chana, ragi, pomegranate	Replace iron lost with blood, which helps fatigue and dizziness.	Beetroot poriyal, palak dal, a few dates, ragi dosa. Add lemon or amla for better absorption.
Eggs, chicken, fish, paneer, dal	Protein and heme iron (from animal foods) rebuild blood and keep energy steady.	One protein food in each meal.
Banana, almonds, pumpkin seeds, dark chocolate (a few squares)	Magnesium relaxes muscles and can lift mood. Dark chocolate also helps cravings.	A banana or handful of nuts, and 1 to 2 squares of dark chocolate.
Khichdi, moong dal soup, curd rice, idli	Warm, light, easy-to-digest meals are comforting if you have nausea, loose stools or low appetite.	Small, regular meals instead of large heavy ones.
Turmeric milk or haldi water	Curcumin has mild anti-inflammatory action. Evidence for period pain is limited, but it is soothing.	A small cup of warm haldi milk at night.
Warm water, coconut water, herbal tea (chamomile)	Warm drinks relax the abdomen, and hydration reduces cramps and headaches.	Sip through the day and avoid ice-cold drinks if they make cramps worse.

4. After Your Period Ends

Rebuild and recharge

Why this works: After your period, the body needs to rebuild. Iron, protein and B12 restore energy as the next cycle begins.

FOOD	WHY IT HELPS	HOW TO INCLUDE IT
Spinach, methi, beetroot, dates, ragi, chana	Rebuild iron and haemoglobin after blood loss to restore energy and focus.	Include 1 or 2 iron-rich foods in each meal for the week after.
Lemon, amla, orange, guava, tomato	Vitamin C increases iron absorption from plant foods.	Squeeze lemon on dal and greens, eat a citrus fruit with meals.
Eggs, paneer, curd, dal, fish, chicken, tofu	Protein supports tissue repair and muscle and keeps energy up.	20 to 25 g of protein in each main meal.
Eggs, milk, curd, fish, fortified foods	B12 helps make red blood cells. Vegetarians need extra care and a possible supplement.	Dairy or eggs daily. Check B12 if tired often.

FOOD	WHY IT HELPS	HOW TO INCLUDE IT
Pumpkin seeds, chickpeas, cashews, whole grains	Zinc and folate support cell growth, skin and immune health.	Seeds in salads, chickpea curries, whole grain rotis.
Whole grains, vegetables and fruits	Fibre supports gut health and helps clear used hormones through the bowel.	Half the plate vegetables and fruit, and whole grains over refined.
Curd, buttermilk, idli, dosa	Probiotics support gut health and digestion, which can be unsettled by hormonal changes.	Daily curd or buttermilk.

5. Foods to Cut Back On

Especially before and during

Why this matters: Some foods can make bloating, cramps or mood swings worse. You don't need to avoid them completely, just cut back, especially in the week before and during your period.

FOOD OR DRINK	WHY	CHOOSE INSTEAD
Salty snacks and packaged foods	Sodium increases water retention and bloating.	Roasted chana, makhana and fresh fruit
Sugary sweets and drinks	Cause energy spikes and crashes and may worsen mood swings and cravings.	Fruit, dates, dark chocolate in small amounts
Too much coffee and strong tea	Caffeine can add to breast tenderness, anxiety and cramps in some people.	1 cup, or switch to ginger, fennel or herbal tea
Fried and ultra-processed foods	Can worsen bloating and inflammation.	Grilled, steamed or home-cooked food
Alcohol	Worsens bloating, mood and sleep, and can dehydrate.	Water, coconut water or herbal tea
Very spicy foods	May upset the stomach in some people during periods.	Milder spices, and cooling curd or buttermilk

6. Meal Ideas by Phase

Using everyday Indian foods

Idea: A simple set of meal ideas for each phase, using everyday Indian foods.

PHASE	BREAKFAST	LUNCH OR DINNER	SNACKS AND DRINKS
Before	Ragi porridge with nuts and banana	Millet roti, dal, vegetables, curd	Roasted chana, a handful of pumpkin seeds, coconut water
During	Oats or idli with sambar, a cup of ginger tea	Khichdi with beetroot and spinach, curd, lemon	Dates and almonds, warm saunf tea, 1 to 2 squares of dark chocolate
After	Egg or paneer bhurji with a roti, orange	Rice, dal, palak sabzi, salad with lemon	Sprouts chaat, buttermilk, fruit

7. Other Things That Help Cramps

Beyond the plate

Remember: Food helps, but it works best alongside these simple measures.

WHAT	HOW IT HELPS	HOW TO USE IT
Heat	A hot water bag or warm compress on the lower abdomen relaxes the uterus and eases pain.	15 to 20 minutes as needed.
Gentle movement	Walking, stretching or yoga can reduce cramps by boosting blood flow and endorphins.	10 to 30 minutes daily, even on period days.
Sleep and stress	Poor sleep and stress make pain feel worse and increase cravings.	7 to 8 hours and a relaxing evening routine.
Pain relievers	Over-the-counter options help some people. Use only as advised by a doctor or pharmacist.	Don't exceed recommended doses.

8. When to See a Doctor

Signs not to ignore

Remember: Period pain is common, but some symptoms need medical attention.

SIGN	WHAT TO DO
Pain so severe it stops you from daily activities, or isn't relieved by usual measures	Could be endometriosis, adenomyosis or fibroids. See a gynaecologist.
Very heavy bleeding (soaking a pad or tampon every hour, large clots) or periods longer than 7 days	Get checked for causes and anaemia.
Fainting, severe dizziness, breathlessness or extreme tiredness	May indicate anaemia. Get a blood test.
Irregular or missed periods, or sudden changes in your cycle	Could relate to PCOS, thyroid or other conditions. See a doctor.
Pain that began after age 25, or gets worse over time	Needs medical evaluation.

Note: This is general nutrition information, not medical advice. Food effects on period pain vary and are usually modest. Ginger, fennel and herbal teas should be used with care if you are pregnant, take blood thinners or have a medical condition. Check with a doctor before supplements, and see a doctor if pain or bleeding is severe or unusual.