

WHAT IS ENDOMETRIOSIS

Endometriosis is a common condition where tissue that behaves like the lining of the womb (endometrium) is found in other parts of the body.

It can appear in many different places, including the ovaries, fallopian tubes, inside the tummy, and in or around the bladder or bowel.

Endometriosis mainly affects girls and women of childbearing age. It's less common in women who've been through the **menopause**.

It's a long-term condition that can have a significant impact on your life, but there are treatments that can help.

SYMPTOMS OF ENDOMETRIOSIS

The symptoms of endometriosis can vary. Some women are badly affected, while others might not have any noticeable symptoms.

Symptoms can include:

- Period pain that it isn't relieved with painkillers
- Heavy periods – for example, you may need to use lots of tampons or pads (or use them together), or the blood might soak through your clothes
- Pelvic pain – this may just occur around the time of your **period** or you may have it all the time
- Pain during and after sex
- Pain or discomfort when going to the toilet
- **Bleeding from your bottom** or blood in your poo
- Feeling tired all the time

WHEN TO SEE YOUR GP

See your GP if you have symptoms of endometriosis, especially if they're having a big impact on your life.

It may help to write down your symptoms before seeing your doctor. Endometriosis UK has a pain and symptom diary (PDF, 238kb) you can use. It can be difficult to diagnose endometriosis because the symptoms can vary considerably, and many other conditions can cause similar symptoms.

If your GP isn't sure what's causing your symptoms, they may refer you to a specialist doctor called a gynaecologist for some further tests.

You'll need to have a **laparoscopy** to confirm endometriosis. This is where a surgeon passes a thin tube through a small cut in your skin so they can see any patches of endometriosis tissue in your body.

TREATMENTS FOR ENDOMETRIOSIS

There's currently no cure for endometriosis, but there are treatments that can help ease the symptoms.

Treatments include:

- **Anti-inflammatory painkillers** – such as ibuprofen
- **Hormone medicines and contraceptives** – including the **combined pill**, the **contraceptive patch**, an **intrauterine system (IUS)** and medicines called gonadotrophin-releasing hormone (**GnRH**) analogues
- **surgery** to cut away patches of endometriosis tissue
- **an operation** to remove part or all of the organs affected by endometriosis – such as surgery to remove the womb (hysterectomy)

Your doctor will discuss the options with you. Sometimes they may suggest not starting treatment immediately to see if your symptoms improve on their own.

FURTHER PROBLEMS CAUSED BY ENDOMETRIOSIS

One of the main complications of endometriosis is difficulty in getting pregnant or not being able to get pregnant at all (**infertility**).

Surgery to remove endometriosis tissue can help improve your chances of getting pregnant, although there's no guarantee that you will be able to get pregnant after treatment.

Surgery for endometriosis can also sometimes cause further problems, such as infections, bleeding, or damage to affected organs. If surgery is recommended for you, talk to your surgeon about the possible risks.

COPING WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS

Endometriosis can be a difficult condition to deal with, both physically and emotionally.

As well as support from your doctor, you may find it useful to contact a support group, such as **Endometriosis UK**, for information and advice.

In addition to detailed information about endometriosis, Endometriosis UK has a **directory of local support groups**, a **helpline** on 0808 808 2227, and an **online community** for women affected by the condition.

CAUSES OF ENDOMETRIOSIS

The cause of endometriosis isn't known.

Several theories have been suggested, including:

- genetics – the condition tends to run in families, and affects people of certain ethnic groups more than others
- retrograde menstruation – when some of the womb lining flows up through the fallopian tubes and embeds itself on the organs of the pelvis, rather than leaving the body as a period
- a problem with the immune system (the body's natural defence against illness and infection)
- endometrium cells spreading through the body in the bloodstream or lymphatic systems (a series of tubes and glands that form part of the immune system)

But none of these theories fully explain why endometriosis occurs. It's likely the condition is caused by a combination of different factors.

Source of information for this factsheet

www.nhs.uk/conditions/Endometriosis/Pages/Introduction.aspx
www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Endometriosis/Pages/Treatment.aspx
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endometriosis

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