



Endometriosis is a common condition that affects about ten percent of women.

It is a condition where tissue, which normally lines the uterus, is found in abnormal sites around the body. Most often though, endometriosis it is found in the pelvis. These deposits can cause a number of symptoms such as pelvic pain and infertility.

What causes it?

The exact cause of endometriosis is still unknown. The most popular theory is that during menstruation, the menstrual tissue passes backwards through the fallopian tubes and into the pelvis where it attaches and grows.

Endometriosis does seem to run in families, so you will be more likely to have it if your mother or another woman in your family has had it.

How is it diagnosed?

The doctor will talk to you about your symptoms and will also do a physical examination. This will provide the doctor with enough information to suspect that you have endometriosis.

If a woman has endometriosis in her ovaries an ultrasound may be able to show it but not always. A definitive diagnosis can only be made if you have a laparoscopy or open surgery.

A laparoscopy is a procedure where a small telescope is passed through a tiny incision in your abdomen.

Laparoscopy is useful for diagnosis and also helps to show how severe the endometriosis is. This will also help the doctor to plan the best treatment for you.

A pathology test or 'biopsy' will be done to confirm the diagnosis. This is important because sometimes endometriosis can be confused with other conditions.

There are currently no non-invasive tests for endometriosis available in Australia.

What problems can it cause?

Many women have endometriosis with no symptoms or problems but this is not always the case.

Common symptoms of endometriosis include:

- period pain
- pain with sex
- pelvic pain at other times of the menstrual cycle
- back pain
- low energy
- pain passing a bowel motion.

All of these symptoms have other possible causes.

Some women who have difficulty becoming pregnant are found to have endometriosis, even when they don't have other symptoms.

How does endometriosis affect fertility?

There are many causes of infertility and there may be more than one cause in any couple. Endometriosis can be found in women who are having trouble getting pregnant. In a minority of these women scar tissue caused by the endometriosis will have caused a blockage of the Fallopian tubes.

However, in most women it is not clear why the endometriosis affects their fertility. Theories include that the endometriosis:

- results in eggs that are less likely to fertilise
- produces natural toxins to sperm.

Where to get more information

Women's Health Information Centre (Victoria only)
Royal Women's Hospital
Tel: (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 442 007 (rural callers)
Email: whic@thewomens.org.au

The Jean Hailes Foundation for Women's Health
Web: <http://www.endometriosis.org.au/>

Related fact sheets

- Treating Endometriosis
- Treating Endometriosis with Laparoscopy