

ENDOMETRIOSIS

INFORMATION FOR WOMEN



the women's
the royal women's hospital
victoria australia

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

It is a condition where tissue, similar to the inner lining of the uterus is found in other sites around the body. Most often endometriosis is found in the pelvis and can affect the reproductive organs. Deposits of endometriosis 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. There are several other theories and there is ongoing research to find a cause for this condition.

Endometriosis does seem to run in families, so you will be more likely to have it if your mother or another close relative 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 information to suspect that you may have endometriosis.

Ultrasound may be able to show if you have endometriosis cysts (endometriomas) on the ovaries or nodules of deep endometriosis, but not always. Ultrasound cannot detect superficial (surface) endometriosis.

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. It 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 or urine.

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 make it more difficult to become pregnant. In a minority of women scar tissue caused by endometriosis will have caused a blockage of the fallopian tubes.

However, in most women it is not clear why the endometriosis affects their fertility. In women who become pregnant, endometriosis does not harm the pregnancy.

For more information

Women's Welcome Centre

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Jean Hailes for Women's Health

www.jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/endometriosis

Related fact sheets on the Women's website

Treating Endometriosis

Treating Endometriosis with Laparoscopy