



## What is endometriosis?

It's a condition where endometrial tissue (cells which bleed in the menstrual cycle) are spread outside the uterine cavity. This tissue still responds to hormonal stimulation, so it can cause immense problems, such as haemorrhage, pain, scarring and more. The scarring occurs because your body tries to defend itself by sealing off the area that's bleeding to protect the rest of the body. Obviously it only occurs in women.

## What causes it?

The medical cause of endometriosis is not known at this stage. There are quite a few theories, but nothing has been recognised as definitive.

But, there are a number of risk factors:

- \* having periods start early in life, and having a short, heavy cycle
- \* being overweight or very tall
- \* having a family history of endometriosis
- \* immune dysfunction, particularly of cell-mediated immunity
- \* a history of menstrual problems
- \* environmental contaminants such as dioxins or burning hazardous waste
- \* high dietary saturated fat intake



## How does the endometrial tissue end up in the wrong place?

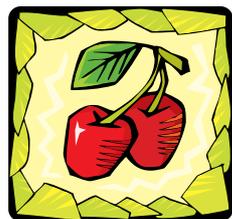
It's thought to be carried in the vascular (blood) or lymphatic systems. Fragments of cells may enter these two streams and be carried through the body to grow in the wrong places.

## What age does it occur?

Between 5-10% of women get endometriosis, and the onset is usually in the 20s and 30s.

## How would I know if I had it?

You could have it and have no symptoms, although that doesn't mean you avoid the internal damage. But if you do have it with symptoms, you'll be having heavy periods, pelvic and abdominal pain, painful ovulation, difficulties with urination and defecation, painful sex and problems which are specific to the tissues where the endometrial tissue has ended up. This can even include the eyes. 35% of endometriosis patients also have polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).



The medical test is laparoscopy, but this won't pick up very early endometriosis, so it's important to be retested later if symptoms continue.

## Is it cancerous?

Actually it is not, but it is the most common gynaecological condition which can require hospital admission except for pregnancy disorders.

## What can happen when I have endometriosis?

You are likely to get bloody deposits and scar tissue in places which weren't designed for them, and it can cause a lot of damage in the pelvic cavity. Scar tissue in the uterine tubes and ovaries can lead to infertility or ectopic pregnancy, which can be a medical emergency. The uterine tissues can also thicken, causing too much bleeding which can lead to anaemia.



## What's an ectopic pregnancy?

That's when the fertilised egg grows in the wrong place. It can cause massive pain and has to be removed as it is outside the womb and your body isn't designed to keep a pregnancy there.



## What can I do about endometriosis?

It can't be cured, but a number of the symptoms can be minimised.

### How?

1. Daily exercise, particularly before the age of 26, including at least 2 hours/week.
2. Reducing saturated fats in the diet and replacing them with fish oils (omega-3 fatty acids). This takes a while, but is worth it.
3. Check for allergies (people with endometriosis often have food allergies too) and try an elimination diet, and possibly a supervised detox.
4. Include plenty of fibre in the diet to avoid constipation so that toxins aren't reabsorbed
5. Treat any dysmenorrhoea, as it may contribute to spreading endometriosis further
6. Balance the thyroid by using kelp, seaweeds etc. and get enough iodine (unless the patient is hyperthyroid)
7. Reduce exposure to all environmental toxins, and lighten the load on your liver
8. Include soy foods in your diet, as they have genistein which helps regulate oestrogen activity
9. Make sure all pathways to excess oestrogen elimination are clear (supplements)
10. Use anti-inflammatory foods and supplements
11. Reduce stress or employ stress-management skills

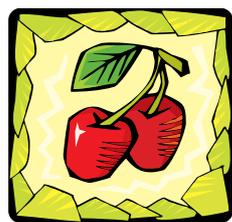


## What sort of supplements would be good?

There are about a dozen herbs which could be useful, but which must be prescribed by a naturopath or herbalist. It can be dangerous to self-medicate, and you should be supervised while taking herbs and notify your doctor.

As for nutrients, the main ones are:

- \* Vitamin B6, which balances reproductive hormones and helps to restore normal progesterone levels
- \* Vitamin E, as it increases progesterone levels where deficient, is an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, and helps to prevent the formation of scar tissue
- \* Vitamin C, as it helps with stress adaptation, is an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, and also helps prevention of scar formation
- \* Magnesium, as it helps relaxation, and is needed for full use of vitamin B6. Also helps reduce blood pressure and is needed in normal cell health and to make energy for exercising
- \* Zinc, as it is a hormone balancer, antioxidant, and suppresses the proliferation of endometrial cells
- \* Fish oils, because they will slowly help to rebalance oestrogen in the tissues, as well as being anti-inflammatory and lowering pain long-term
- \* If hypothyroidism exists, iodine (supervised, not self-medicated as too much is dangerous) or kelp (which contains iodine) are useful balancers
- \* If anaemia is present, iron supplements and/or vitamins B6, 9 and 12 may be necessary depending on what type of anaemia is diagnosed. If you're tired and very pale, get a blood test to determine this first.



## Anything else?

Surgery is sometimes used to cauterise or remove visible growths or tissue in places which are dangerous. Doctors do sometimes also employ hormone treatment to disrupt the secretion of oestrogen. Natural therapists prefer to balance out the hormones as they all have their place, and avoid surgery unless absolutely necessary, so using vitamins C and E to minimise scar formation is part of the treatment.



You should also make sure you have strategies to minimise stress. Join a yoga or tai chi class, meditate, use Bach Flower Remedies, have counselling or breathwork and generally look after and take responsibility for your own mental, emotional and physical health.