



What is endometriosis?

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Endometriosis is a common **gynaecological disorder**.¹ The **lining of the uterus is called the endometrium** and endometriosis occurs when **endometrial-like tissue** is found **outside the uterus**. The occurrence of this misplaced tissue **triggers inflammation or swelling** which results in **pain** and something called **adhesions** – where scar tissue sticks to other organs in the body.² This endometrial tissue outside the uterus is found in areas like the **abdomen, the ovaries, bladder or ureters** which is the tube leading from the kidney to the bladder. Endometriosis depends on the hormone **oestrogen**.³



It is a complex disease that can affect women from when their periods start until after menopause.⁴

The **cause** of endometriosis remains **unknown**.² There are different theories as to how endometriosis develops in the body. The most common theory is that when you **menstruate**, blood containing cells from the lining of the uterus flows back through the tubes connecting the uterus with the ovaries, into the pelvis to other organs where they **implant themselves and grow**.



Another theory is that **cells outside the uterus change** into cells like those of the endometrium and start to grow and the final theory is that **stem cells** in the body, which are like the body's raw material, give rise to the disease of endometriosis which then spreads through the body using the blood and lymph vessels.⁴

Endometriosis is common but how common? It is estimated that **between 2 - 10 %** of women in the general population suffer from endometriosis and **30 - 50 % of women who are battling to fall pregnant** due to infertility, suffer from endometriosis.²

Endometriosis can be classified by your doctor as being **minimal, mild, moderate or severe** depending on the lesions and adhesions in your pelvis.¹

Symptoms of endometriosis²

Symptoms of endometriosis are not very specific but can include the following:

- Painful menstrual periods
- Non-menstrual pelvic pain or pain occurring when a woman is not menstruating.
- Pain during or after sexual intercourse
- Pain emptying bladder/painful urination
- Pain emptying bowel
- Painful rectal bleeding or the presence of blood in the urine
- Shoulder tip pain
- Cyclical lung problems
- Cyclical cough, chest pain, or coughing of blood
- Cyclical scar swelling and pain
- Fatigue
- Infertility
- Any other cyclical symptom



According to research, there are some factors which may make you more susceptible to getting endometriosis. These include:^{3,5}

- Age when you first started menstruating – if before age 11 then there's an increased risk of endometriosis
- Pattern of your monthly bleed – if your period occurs less than every 27 days, this could also be a risk
- Low BMI
- Had few births
- Daily alcohol intake is at least 10 g (or 1 drink per day)
- If you smoke

Your **diet plays an important role** in preventing endometriosis. Make sure that you eat green vegetables and fresh fruit as they contain antioxidants that help your immune system.³ You need to follow a healthy lifestyle balanced with rest and physical activity.³



Treatment

Endometriosis is a chronic disease that cannot be eliminated completely.²

Treatment options to help effectively **reduce your symptoms** include:



Painkillers – NSAIDs (for inflammation) to reduce the pain associated with endometriosis²



Hormone treatment – such as progestogens, reduce the production of oestrogen in the body²



Surgery – to eliminate the endometriotic lesions.²



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Remember that if you have any questions about your endometriosis, please speak to your doctor.



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