



Endometriosis

What Is Endometriosis? How Common Is It?

The endometrium is made up of cells that line the inside of your womb (uterus). These cells are shed every month when a woman has her period. Endometriosis is a condition where cells that are similar to endometrial cells are found outside of the normal location. These cells can implant on ovaries, fallopian tubes, ligaments that support the uterus and tissues that cover the bladder and rectum. These implants respond to hormones from the ovary, which can cause scarring and pelvic pain. In the U.S., It occurs in 7-10% of women of reproductive age. In adolescents with severe and lasting menstrual pain, more than half may have endometriosis. Endometriosis can run in families.

What Causes Endometriosis?

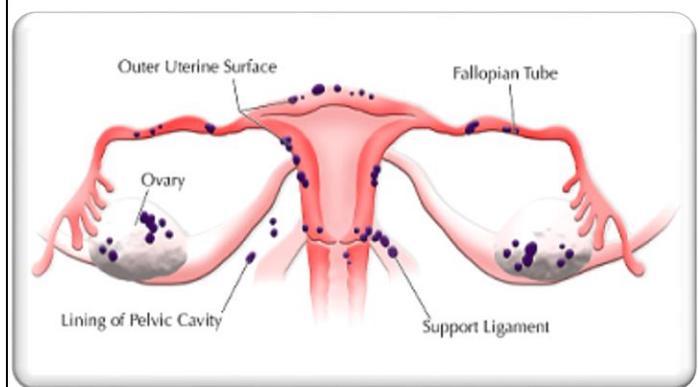
It is not completely understood why some girls get endometrial-like cells implanting in their pelvis, and others do not. One theory is that during the period, some of the blood and endometrial cells that usually comes out through the vagina can escape through the fallopian tubes and implant outside of the uterus. Girls with endometriosis are not able to prevent these implants from growing and the body's immune system cells cannot clean up these implants. Over time, these implants can cause bleeding, scarring and pain.

How Does Your Healthcare Provider Diagnose Endometriosis?

A detailed history of the timing of pain with periods is important. A physical exam will include an abdominal exam and may also include a pelvic exam (an exam of the vagina and uterus). A pelvic ultrasound is often done to exclude a mass or other abnormality. Other imaging studies, blood tests and cultures may be obtained to be sure there are no other causes of your pelvic pain. Many girls are asked to keep a detailed diary of pain, periods, diet and bowel movements. Unfortunately, there are no diagnostic blood tests, x-rays or imaging tests that confirm endometriosis. The diagnosis is often made based on clinical symptoms. Usually, if there is no improvement using 3 to 6 months of medical treatment, a diagnostic laparoscopy can be performed to allow your doctor to look at your pelvic organs. A laparoscopy is a surgical procedure that is done in the operating room. A camera is inserted in through the belly-button to search for endometriosis. Most girls who have this procedure will not have to stay in the hospital and can go home that day to recover.

What Are The Symptoms Of Endometriosis?

Many girls will experience pelvic pain before and during their period. The pain can be crampy, dull, sharp, stabbing and can radiate to your back or down your legs. The pain sometimes gets progressively worse and can become present all the time. Interestingly, there is no relationship between the amount of disease and the level of pain. Some teens will have a lot of endometriosis and have very little pain, while others may have a small amount of endometriosis and experience severe pain. Girls with endometriosis can experience pain during sex, urination, and bowel movements.



How Do You Treat Endometriosis?

The hormones in birth control can be used to block the effects of ovarian hormones on the endometrial implants. First line medical treatment often involves using a method of birth control such as birth control pill, patch, ring, shot, implant or IUD to alleviate symptoms of endometriosis. Sometimes gonadotropin-releasing hormone agonists (GnRH), such as Lupron, are prescribed to lower ovarian hormones and reduce the pain from endometriosis. This is not usually a first line treatment for girls under age 16 due to its potential effect on bone density formation. If you continue to have pain despite medical treatment, a surgical procedure, called laparoscopy (camera surgery), may be performed for both diagnosis and treatment. During laparoscopy, the endometrial implants will be removed. Medical treatments are usually prescribed once again after surgery to keep further implants from forming. Early diagnosis, pain management and a long-term treatment plan helps girls to continue to be active in their normal daily lives. Also to help with pain or for additional support, many girls are referred for other services such as biofeedback, physical therapy, acupuncture, exercise programs and psychological counseling.