

Endometriosis & Pelvic Pain: The Basics

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IPPS 2017 Patient Advocate Reporter

Spine & Sports Medicine Fellow

Northwestern University/McGaw Medical Center & Shirley Ryan AbilityLab - Chicago, IL

Mentor: Kenneth Barron, MD

Based upon:

Epidemiology of Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain

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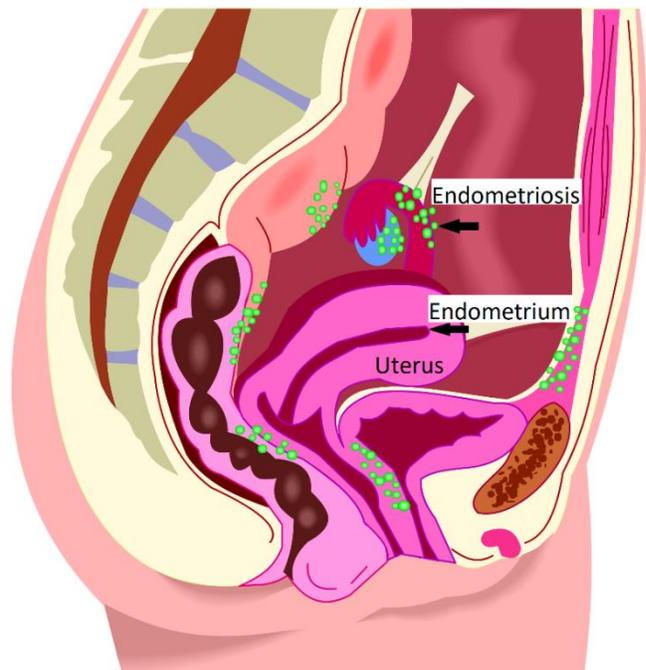
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SUMMARY

The uterus is lined by a layer of cells called the *endometrium*. When these same types of cells grow in other parts of the body it is called *endometriosis*. Endometriosis is common. It is diagnosed in 1 out of every 10 women. Symptoms can start as soon as girls begin to have periods, while other women never have symptoms. The most common symptoms are painful periods (*dysmenorrhea*) and pelvic pain. Pain gets worse at the time of the month when a woman gets her period. Endometriosis can also make it hard for women to get pregnant (*infertility*). Symptoms usually resolve when a woman stops having periods (*menopause*), but not always. If a woman has these symptoms, she should mention them to her doctor. Doctors can begin treatment based on symptoms, but surgery to look inside the abdomen is the only way to confirm a diagnosis.

Endometriosis can cause a lower quality of life and sexual satisfaction due to pain. It can also lead to social isolation as women spend an average of 18 days per year in bed due to their symptoms. When symptoms are severe, women may need to be admitted to the hospital. It is the 3rd leading cause of hospitalization for gynecologic reasons. Endometriosis can be





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treated with medications such as birth control pills or pain pills. If a woman still has symptoms, the next treatment is surgery. First, a surgeon might try to remove the invasive tissue. If that doesn't work, the surgeon may need to remove the uterus (*hysterectomy*) and ovaries (*oophorectomy*). This type of surgery is a last resort. When the uterus and ovaries are removed, a woman can no longer have periods or get pregnant.

Doctors do not know exactly why endometriosis happens or why some women have severe pain and others have none. Cigarette smoking is linked to a greater risk for pain. Healthy eating is linked to a smaller risk of pain. Women should talk to their doctors about how to stop smoking and how to eat healthy foods.

More funding and research is needed for endometriosis to help doctors treat this important and common disease more easily.