

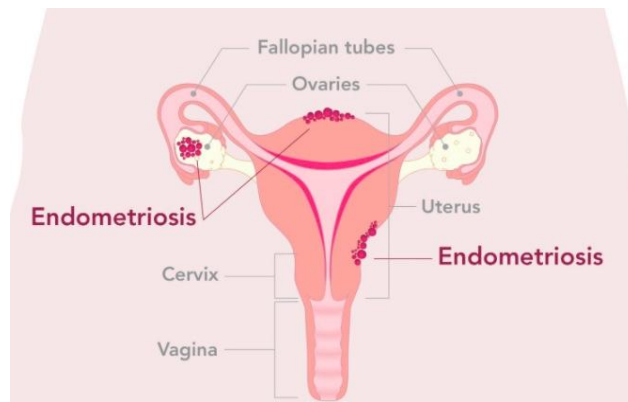
Endometriosis

What is Endometriosis?

Endometriosis is an often-painful disorder in which tissue that normally lines the inside of your uterus grows outside this lining. With this condition, displaced endometrial tissue continues to act as it normally would — it thickens, breaks down and bleeds with each menstrual cycle.

Because this displaced tissue has no way to exit your body, it becomes trapped, causing surrounding tissue to become irritated, and can cause scar tissue, adhesions and cysts.

There are four stages of endometriosis, which are ranked from minimal, mild, moderate, or severe. The stage is determined by the amount of adhesions that an individual has.



What Are the Symptoms of Endometriosis?

The most common symptom of endometriosis is pelvic pain, usually associated with the menstrual period. Other signs and symptoms include:

- Painful periods
- Pain with intercourse
- Pain with bowel movements or urination
- Excessive bleeding while on your period

- Infertility
- Fatigue, diarrhea, constipation, bloating, nausea, etc. (especially while on your period)

How is Endometriosis Diagnosed?

There are a number of different ways to diagnose endometriosis.

Pelvic Exam: Your doctor will manually feel areas on your pelvis, searching for abnormalities, such as cysts on your reproductive organs or scars behind your uterus. However, it is often not possible to feel small areas of endometriosis.

Ultrasound: You may receive an ultrasound with the device (transducer) pressed against your abdomen or inserted into your vagina. Both types may be done to get the best view possible. The ultrasound will not tell your doctor whether you have endometriosis, but it can identify cysts that are associated with the disorder.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging: An MRI may be performed to create detailed images of your organs and tissues. This approach is often used to determine the size and location of the endometrial implants.

Laparoscopy: While under general anesthesia, a tiny incision is made near your belly button, where the surgeon inserts a tiny instrument (laparoscope) which allows them to see inside of your abdomen. It is used to look for signs of endometrial tissue outside of the uterus, or to remove a tissue sample for testing. This is a last resort used if other methods have failed or surgical intervention is indicated.

What Are the Causes of Endometriosis?

The exact cause of endometriosis is not known, however there are a number of possible explanations, which include the transformation of embryonic cells into endometrial cells and endometrial cells attaching to a surgical incision (C-section, hysterectomy, etc.)

Other risk factors may include:

- Starting your period at an early age
- Going through menopause at an older age
 - Short menstrual cycles
 - Alcohol consumption
 - Having a low body mass index
- Having one or more relatives with the disorder
 - Uterine abnormalities

How is Endometriosis Treated?

There is no cure for endometriosis. However, steps may be taken to control the symptoms.

The two main treatment options for endometriosis are typically medication (pain medication or hormone therapy) or surgery. Conservative approaches are attempted first, leaving surgery as an option only if all other treatments fail.

A laparoscopy may be performed to remove tissue, or in more extensive cases, through traditional abdominal surgery. Finally, if all other options fail, a removal of the uterus (hysterectomy) and possibly ovaries (oophorectomy) may be performed. This approach is typically avoided, as removing ovaries results in early menopause and may have a long-term effect on your health, especially if the surgery is performed before the age of 35.

What Are the Possible Complications of Endometriosis?

The two most common complications that occur from endometriosis are infertility and ovarian cancer.

Between one-third and one-half of individuals with endometriosis have difficulty getting pregnant. This is because endometriosis may obstruct the fallopian tube, keeping the sperm and egg from uniting. The condition may also cause damage to the sperm or egg. However, many individuals with mild to moderate endometriosis can still conceive and carry a pregnancy to term. It is often advised not to delay pregnancy, as the condition may worsen with time.

The overall lifetime risk of ovarian cancer is low. However, while still low, this form of cancer does occur at higher rates in individuals with endometriosis. Although rare, another form of cancer known as endometriosis associated adenocarcinoma may develop later in life in those individuals with endometriosis.

If you have any further questions regarding endometriosis or would like to see a health care provider regarding any sexual health matter, please contact us.

Sexual Health Questions? We have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am – 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am – 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9am – 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

Friday: 9am – 4:30pm

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Revised July 2020