



8 things all women should know about endometriosis

Because it affects more people than you'd think.



GETTY

By Eleanor Jones 22 April 2016

827

It's more common than you think

1 in 10 women of reproductive age in the UK suffer from endometriosis – that's the same number of people who have diabetes - so if you're one of them, it's likely that you're not the only person in your social circle that's suffering. It's the second most common gynecological problem in the country, and although that doesn't make it easier to handle the pain on a particularly rough day, you can take some comfort in knowing you're not alone.

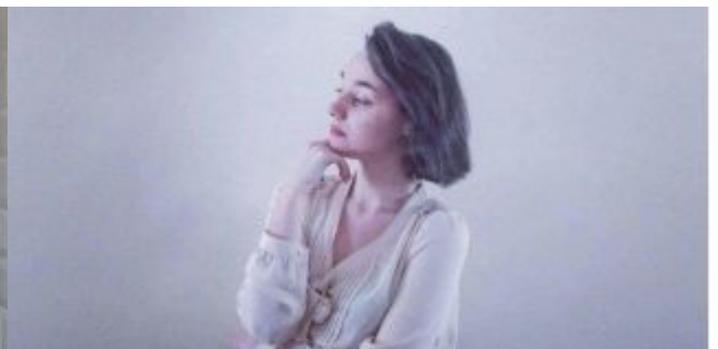
The symptoms can be brutal

"The most common symptoms of endometriosis are pelvic pain, abnormal menstrual cycles and fertility problems," explains Clare Blake, founder of [Fertility Massage](#). "However, if endometriosis occurs behind the uterus, in the area between the uterus and rectum, it can also cause painful sexual intercourse, rectal pressure and pain with bowel movements, especially before a period." You may also experience pain in surrounding areas, including your thighs, hips and back, and feel persistently exhausted – which is totally not surprising when your body is handling all of the above.

MORE FROM FASHION, HAIR & BEAUTY, SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS :: COSMOPOLITAN UK



A Worrying Link Between This Common Shower Routine...



My Period Ruined My Life

Diagnosis is tricky

The problem is that a lot of symptoms of endometriosis can be really similar to other conditions, like irritable bowel syndrome, or an ovarian cyst. Endometriosis UK have a helpful pain and symptom diary which helps you to address relevant questions and helps your doctor deduce whether it is actually endometriosis that you're experiencing. Although an ultrasound may be recommended, endometriosis can only be confidently diagnosed through a laparoscopy, which is a keyhole surgery that you'll need general anaesthetic for (although you generally get to go home the same day).

The cause of endometriosis isn't yet known...

Which can be really frustrating, because nobody can give you all the answers. According to the NHS, the most widely accepted theory is the womb lining doesn't leave the body properly during a period and embeds itself on the organs of the pelvis, causing severe pain. This is known as **retrograde menstruation**, but doesn't explain why the condition can occur in women who have had a hysterectomy, and recent research suggests that it may actually be an autoimmune disease. Daughters or sisters of women with endometriosis are also more likely to experience it themselves, so there's a potential hereditary link too.

...and there's still no 'cure'

Symptoms can be managed with painkillers and hormone medication, but endometriosis can flare up randomly, and can interfere with everything from your sexual relationships to your career. Taking time off work isn't ideal, but with chronic conditions like endometriosis, it can be necessary, so don't be afraid or embarrassed to talk to your boss and explain your situation. It's not a visible illness, so they may not realise how much you're suffering, and you might even be able to make changes to your working day to make life easier – for instance, working from home, or changing your hours or shift pattern.



lenadunham

• För 7 månader sedan

Följ

Lena Dunham is an open sufferer of endometriosis

However, there are tons of ways to ease symptoms

Managing pain varies from woman to woman, ranging from simple options like breathing techniques and heat pads to painkillers, hormonal medication, like the contraceptive pill, or surgery. There are two main types of surgery – conservative surgery, which removes the deposits caused by endometriosis, or complex surgery, where organs such as the bowel or bladder are removed. In very severe cases, a hysterectomy (removal of the womb) or oophorectomy (removal of the ovaries) may be carried out, but this is a massive decision, particularly if you haven't started a family yet,

and isn't right for everyone. Other options that may be helpful include fertility massage, which breaks down adhesions and scar tissue in the pelvic area, or using a castor oil pack to improve circulation, ease menstrual pain and draw out toxicity. You can see how to perform a castor oil pack [here](#).

It's nothing to do with cancer

Women's health issues like ovarian and cervical cancer have come far more into the public eye in recent years, and that's brilliant – but it doesn't mean any illness to do with this area is automatically linked to these illnesses. Endometriosis is not contagious or an infection – it cannot be passed from person to person, and it is definitely NOT a form of cancer. As [Endometriosis UK](#) explains, "every single benign tissue in our bodies has the potential to turn into cancer; therefore it could be argued that the deposits of endometriosis could turn into cancer. However, this would be an extremely rare event."



lenadunham

• För 6 månader sedan

Följ

It doesn't automatically mean you're infertile

"The biggest problem that endometriosis causes with fertility is the adhesions or scarring caused. This may affect natural conception from occurring, depending on where the scarring appears," says Claire. "However, many women with endometriosis do go on to conceive and carry to term." It's estimated that around half of women with endometriosis have difficulty getting pregnant, but this also means that 50% don't have trouble. It's dependent on loads of different factors, including the severity of your endometriosis and your age, so if you want to have a baby and are concerned that your endometriosis might stop you, speak to your doctor, who can advise on the best course of action for you and your partner.

Come and check us out on [Snapchat Discover](#).



RELATED ARTICLE

3 signs your period isn't normal

SEE THE CONVERSATION!