

OBSTETRICS &
GYNAECOLOGY

Beyond painful periods

Endometriosis is a condition that is more than just painful periods. This article sheds light on the common concerns and misconceptions about the disease.



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An estimated one in 10 women suffers from endometriosis during her childbearing years. It is an inflammatory condition where the lining of the womb, or endometrium, grows outside the uterus in areas such as the ovaries, fallopian tubes or intestines. Although not life-threatening, endometriosis can have a significant impact on a woman's physical and social well-being, including impairing her fertility.

1

Beyond painful periods

Depending on where the endometrium is growing, there may be pain in the pelvis, rectum, vagina or lower back. This pain may occur before or during the menstrual cycle, or all the time. Some women experience increased pain during sex (dyspareunia), ovulation and when moving their bowels. Abnormal bleeding is another characteristic of endometriosis, where heavy periods, post-intercourse bleeding or blood in urine or stools may show up.

2

Symptoms vary

Some women who are asymptomatic do not realise that they have endometriosis until they consult a doctor when they have problems getting pregnant or go through a procedure for another problem. Some women with mild endometriosis go through intense pain, while others with an advanced condition may have little or even no pain at all.

3

All areas of life affected

Due to the impact of painful symptoms, endometriosis patients have been reported to suffer from high levels of stress in all areas of their life, including maintaining a career, family and personal relationships. For instance, the physical pain experienced during intercourse can disrupt a healthy sexual relationship, hence causing distress. Also, women with endometriosis face a slightly higher risk of contracting ovarian cancer.

4

Impact on fertility

Between 20% and 40% of women with impaired fertility have endometriosis. However, many women with mild to moderate endometriosis are still able to conceive and bear a pregnancy to its full term. As the condition may worsen with time, women with endometriosis are advised by doctors not to delay having children.

5

There is help

Although there is no known cure, endometriosis can still be treated with medication or surgery. The approach taken by the doctor and patient depends on several considerations, including the severity of the symptoms, the desire to conceive and have children, the size of the endometriotic cysts, and the risk of cancerous changes. Generally, doctors will opt for a more conservative approach — such as over-the-counter pain relievers and hormonal therapies — before surgery, which is more invasive, is considered. [🔗](#)