

ENDOMETRIOSIS

Explained

Over 1.5 million women in the UK alone have endometriosis, a disease that mainly affects those between the ages of 25 and 40. For some, it will seriously reduce their chance of conceiving a baby; yet many others go on to successfully have children. Obstetrician-gynaecologists **Dr Michele Lee Sook Ling** and **Dr Dharshini Gopalakrishnakone** give us the facts.

What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis is a gynaecological condition where tissue similar to the lining of the womb grows in other areas of the body, most commonly in the pelvic region.

How can it be diagnosed?

Endometriosis cannot be accurately diagnosed from symptoms and an external examination alone. It has many varying symptoms which may be confused with other conditions. A laparoscopy (a small telescope inserted into the abdomen through a hole cut in the belly button so that the gynaecologist can look for endometrial implants and cysts within the pelvis) and excision of the suspected tissue is the only definite way to make a diagnosis.

What are endometriotic cysts?

Endometriotic cysts occur when womb tissue grows on the ovaries. During a woman's period this tissue also bleeds, causing blood-filled cysts that change colour to dark brown over time; these endometriomas are known commonly as chocolate cysts. They can only be removed with surgery, unlike functional cysts which usually go away on their own.

How is endometriosis treated?

Treatment can include hormonal management, surgery, natural therapies, lifestyle changes, and medication for pain management. Factors influencing treatment include the severity of endometriosis, the symptoms and whether the patient wishes to have a baby.



See your doctor if you have these symptoms:

- Painful or heavy periods
- Pain during intercourse
- Pelvic pain
- Infertility
- Low backache

MYTH: Ovarian cyst surgery reduces fertility significantly.

Endometriosis can cause the fallopian tubes to be blocked, making it difficult for fertilisation to occur. However, a good surgeon will conserve as much healthy tissue as possible. Even in serious cases where an ovary has to be removed, the remaining ovary will continue to produce viable eggs to maintain fertility. **1**

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