



## What is Endometriosis?

The endometrium is a special type of tissue that usually lines the inner walls of a woman's uterus. Sometimes endometrium migrates and becomes implanted in other areas within the pelvis. In women with [endometriosis](#) there may be **endometrial tissue on the fallopian tubes**, the ovaries or anywhere else on the lining of the pelvis- these are all places endometrial tissue is not meant to be.

During a woman's normal [menstrual cycle](#) the **endometrium within the uterus becomes thickened** and prepared for the possibility of conception and pregnancy. This occurs under the influence of hormones in the blood stream. If conception does not occur, the hormone levels decrease and the endometrium comes away from the wall of the uterus and is shed through the vagina – what we know as menstruation or our monthly period.

In women with [endometriosis](#) the same process occurs but the extra endometrial tissue in various sites around the pelvis reacts in the same way to hormonal changes in the bloodstream. This means the **misplaced endometrium thickens and breaks down** as normal but then has nowhere to exit the body and becomes trapped. This can lead to inflammation and pain in the surrounding tissue and, in the long term, can form cysts and scar tissue.

## How will I know if I have Endometriosis?

[Endometriosis](#) can cause severe pain, usually in the pelvic area, and women with this condition usually feel the most **pain and discomfort during their monthly period**. This pain can be debilitating and is generally more severe than what other women experience as "[period pain](#)." Other symptoms of this condition are menorrhagia or excessive menstrual bleeding, bleeding in between periods and pain during sexual intercourse or bowel movements.

[Endometriosis](#) may also decrease fertility and is an important factor in women who are having **difficulty getting pregnant**. In some women, [endometriosis](#) may cause few or even no symptoms at all.

[Endometriosis](#) is a very common disorder and current estimates indicate that almost 1 in 10 women in their reproductive years suffer from this condition. It is most common in women who have not had children.

## What Causes Endometriosis?

Modern medicine is not quite sure what causes endometriosis. However, although the [cause of endometriosis](#) has not been scientifically proven, there are a number

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of possible options that are being researched by conventional medicine. One theory is that a small amount of **menstrual blood does not flow out of the vagina** as is usual but instead travels backwards through the fallopian tubes into the pelvic cavity.

Endometrial cells contained in this blood then act as “seeds” to produce areas of endometrial tissue outside of the uterus. It is not understood why this process leads to [endometriosis](#) in some women but not others. Studies suggest that it has something to do with immune system functioning. Another theory is that the **endometrial cells are transferred within the bloodstream**. This theory is based on the fact that endometrial cells can be isolated from blood in the blood vessels and would explain cases of endometriosis found in obscure sites such as the lung.

Traditional Chinese and Oriental medicine has a different understanding and approach to the [cause of endometriosis](#) – but one which fits the current scientific knowledge and would fill in many of the gaps in scientists’ theories. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, [endometriosis](#) is classified as a liver disorder and associated with liver stagnation. In every woman with endometriosis the **underlying cause for this liver blood stagnation** may be slightly different but the outcome is similar.

Recent studies have supported this theory and implicated **chronic exposure to dioxins** (an environmental pollutant) to both liver health and endometriosis independently. Unfortunately, for women living a modern lifestyle, avoiding these dioxins would be very difficult as they are found in a large proportion of all fish, meat and dairy products produced for human consumption. A compromised liver would also play a part in weakening the immune system – once again a factor implicated in endometriosis.

Eating foods that are understood to be liver-weakening is also a problem of modern lifestyle and endometriosis. Refined foods, especially those containing wheat flour and sugar, deep fried foods, caffeine and ice-cold drinks, all compromise liver functioning and should be avoided by women in general, but particularly those with a predisposition to or past experience of [endometriosis](#). Stress is also a big enemy of liver health and in Chinese medicine the liver is considered the most emotion-sensitive organ of the body.

Apart from stress and environmental toxicity, conventional drugs and medications are also largely to blame for liver weakness and stagnation. **Painkillers are a huge culprit in endometriosis**. Women with this condition often rely on conventional pain killers and Non-Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drug’s (NSAIDs) to help them cope with the pain around menstruation. NSAID’s are one of the most damaging classes of drugs, especially to the liver and kidneys, and these medicines can actually contribute to the worsening of [endometriosis](#) in the long-term, even causing irreversible damage.


## Diagnosing Endometriosis

Because various other conditions may mimic the same symptoms as endometriosis, it is important to consult your health care provider about any [troublesome menstrual symptoms](#) or anything else that causes you to suspect this condition. Endometriosis is usually easily diagnosed by means of an internal



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### Michele Carelse, Clinical Psychologist



All of our natural remedies are formulated by our expert team of herbalists, naturopaths and homeopaths, and headed by Michele Carelse.

Michele has had years of experience in the manufacturing and use of natural remedies. In addition, she is a trained Clinical Psychologist and has been incorporating natural remedies into her treatment of patients with depression, anxiety, ADD, ADHD and stress for many years with spectacular results.

pelvic examination. Other tests that may be necessary include blood tests, a laparoscopy or an ultra-sound.

If left untreated or if poorly managed endometriosis generally worsens over time. The most serious and often heart-breaking **complication of endometriosis is infertility**. Endometriosis is sometimes diagnosed for the first time when a woman seeks fertility treatment.

Scar tissue caused by endometriosis may be the culprit in preventing conception – sometimes partially or completely blocking the path of the egg to be fertilized. There are probably also other, less understood ways that **endometriosis can affect fertility** and although many women with endometriosis can still fall pregnant, it usually takes longer than average or requires some type of intervention.

## Help for Endometriosis

Conventional treatment for endometriosis is based on prescription medications or surgery depending on the severity of the condition and whether the woman wants to get pregnant.

For women who wish to **control the pain of endometriosis** and menstruation in this condition, the most common treatment is with Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAID's) which vary in effectiveness depending on the severity of the condition, the strength of the drug prescribed as well as individual factors. The use of pain-killers or NSAID's in [endometriosis](#) is only really effective at treating the symptoms, such as **menstrual cramps, pelvic pain and painful intercourse** and will have no positive long-term effect on the condition itself.

Hormonal medications including the contraceptive pill are used to treat the progression of endometriosis itself and are useful in **reducing symptoms and shrinking the endometrial deposits**. Unfortunately though, hormonal drugs are also only a temporary solution. While using these drugs the endometriosis will be suppressed and symptoms improved but long-term, the condition will return. Within 1-2 years of stopping hormonal treatment, the endometriosis will flare-up again with all of the associated symptoms. Also, large deposits of endometrial tissue in the pelvis (i.e. larger than 3 cm in diameter) do not generally respond to hormonal treatment at all.

Both NSAID's and hormonal treatments can also cause a variety of adverse side-effects including irregular bleeding, thrombosis, menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, reduced bone density and vaginal dryness (which may or may not be reversible). As mentioned above, use of painkillers and NSAID's can also compromise liver functioning – thereby contributing to the continuation or even worsening of the endometriosis.

Surgery may be regarded as either conservative or radical. In conservative surgery endometrial deposits, scar tissue and cysts are removed as much as is possible with the maximum amount of healthy tissue left intact. Radical surgery is usually reserved for severe cases or women who have completed their families and usually takes the form of a complete hysterectomy.

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# Natural Herbal and Homeopathic Remedies

By treating the **underlying cause of the endometriosis** – namely a poorly functioning liver – Traditional Chinese Medicine has the potential to cure the condition and prevent future recurrence rather than just suppressing the symptoms and outcomes as is the case with conventional medicine.

The herbal ingredients used in traditional Oriental treatment of endometriosis work by fundamentally changing the **functioning of the liver and female reproductive system**. In order to do this, the treatment must be continued regularly for a regimen of several months and even longer if necessary in particularly stubborn cases. Medicinal herbs in general take longer than allopathic medicines to show their effectiveness but the patience and persistence required is usually worth the safer, superior and often permanent results achieved.

Herbal ingredients associated with the holistic treatment of [endometriosis](#) include Vitex agnus-castus (also known as Chasteberry), Don Quai and Milk Thistle. Both Vitex agnus-castus and Don Quai act as hormone balancers and are well known for their beneficial effects when **treating female reproductive disorders**, while Milk Thistle is particularly effective in the treatment of liver problems.

## More Information on Endometriosis

- Don't ignore [severe menstrual symptoms](#) as normal or "part of life". The symptoms of endometriosis can be debilitating and negatively affect your whole life, even your emotional wellbeing. Left untreated endometriosis may also worsen and lead to complications.
- Take regular exercise – apart from all the other health benefits, exercise will strengthen your liver as well as keep oestrogen levels balanced.
- Avoid prescription drugs especially hormonal medications, pain killers and NSAID's.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet based mainly on organic, whole food with lots of fruit and vegetables. Avoid refined and processed foods as well as caffeine-containing food and drinks as these may contribute to higher levels of estrogen and thus worsening the symptoms of endometriosis.
- When buying meat or fish, try and buy from organic sources known to come from farms which follow organic farming methods, without the use of antibiotics, growth hormones and artificial pesticides. Make sure that eggs and poultry come from farms which feed whole grain to their birds and no animal derived food.
- Make sure your diet includes Omega-3 fatty acids which are found in fish, flax seed, and eggs, and in many available supplements.
- Take the time to relax and de-stress. Stress hormones tend to aggravate the pain associated with menstrual cramps and endometriosis so consider exploring some relaxing activities, meditation, yoga or deep breathing exercises.

## The Natural Approach

While Western medicine has become the norm in many cultures, it is not the only treatment option. Conventional western medicine, often called allopathic medicine, is the system of medicine taught at most medical schools and most pharmaceutical and synthetic medicines are manufactured and marketed



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according to the principles of allopathic medicine. Allopathic medicine is also sometimes called orthodox medicine.

Because most of us in the Western world have grown up in a society in which allopathic medicine is the prevailing norm, we forget that, only a few decades ago, homeopathic, herbal and other natural medicines were commonly available – and freely used even by conventional doctors. While there are often heated debates about which system of medicine is ‘better’ than the other, many responsible doctors (whether they are allopathic or not) recognize that both have a role to play in the treatment program.

Natural medicine has often been frowned on by conventional doctors, especially by those who did not have sufficient knowledge of these medicines. However, it is encouraging to note that some medical schools are now beginning to re-introduce it into their course work, thereby providing doctors with a wider range of treatment options from which to choose. In many countries, especially in Europe, India and China, natural and homeopathic medicines are commonly prescribed by conventional doctors and represent a significant part of the total annual drug sales.

Naturopathy is a branch of medicine (just as allopathy is a branch of medicine) which operates according to the underlying philosophy that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. While natural medicines are often called ‘alternative’ or ‘complimentary’ medicines, they are, in fact, a unique and independent form of medicine in their own right, well able to treat a variety of conditions. Perhaps the term ‘holistic’ medicine is more apt, given the broad range of treatment options and approaches which are to be found within the practice of natural medicine, which encompasses many different disciplines, including herbalism, homeopathy, iridology, osteopathy, chiropractic, therapeutic massage techniques, aromatherapy, acupuncture and many, many more.

Most naturopaths will use a variety of treatment modalities in order to treat their patients in a holistic way to support health, relieve symptoms and prevent future disease. In fact, even the World Health Organization defines health as being "... more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being." This is a wonderfully clear description of holistic or natural medicine, which strives to support health (thereby relieving or preventing symptoms), rather than simply eliminating disease.

Although allopathic medicine certainly has a role to play and has made a tremendous contribution to medical science during the past century, there is a growing perception that it is not the only answer and that, in many cases, holistic medicine can accomplish just as much, if not more – without the risk of side effects, addiction and sacrifice to health so commonly associated with pharmaceutical drugs. Contrary to common perception, and provided that they are manufactured in the correct way, natural medicines can work quickly and safely to promote healing.

In many cases, they can succeed where pharmaceutical drugs have failed. Despite frequent reports that they are ‘unproven’ and ‘untested’, the opposite is true. Natural medicines have a long history of usage and there is a wealth of empirical evidence to support their effectiveness and safety. In addition, active clinical research is carried out by many academic hospitals and universities to support the extensive traditional and empirical evidence behind natural medicines.

It is also important to know that, like any medicine, herbal and homeopathic

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medicines must be manufactured in the correct way, following acceptable procedures and manufacturing methods to ensure maximum effectiveness and safety. Due to the recent rise in popularity of natural remedies, many companies have sprung up to take advantage of the market. Unfortunately not all of them are equipped to manufacture to the correct standards, often resulting in a flood of inferior (and sometimes even unsafe) remedies onto the market – and giving natural remedies a bad name.

Even some pharmaceutical companies have rushed to claim their market share by producing so-called ‘standardized’ extracts of herbs and offering these as superior to the tried and tested methods of naturopathic manufacturing. Nothing could be further from the truth. While ‘standardized’ extracts may offer benefit of easy consistency of dosage (and cheaper more efficient production lines), they have grave disadvantages. These include an increase in side effects as the medicines produced in this manner lose the natural protective properties of the herbs. In some cases, these side effects have proved fatal – as was seen in the liver toxicity associated with standardized extracts of kava kava, a herb previously safely used for generations without any known side effects.

Most naturopaths recommend what is called the Full Spectrum Method of extraction – which retains the benefits of ALL the active ingredients within the herb as opposed to isolating only one – thereby providing a more complete treatment as well as superior protection against side effects.

Whatever your choice, always choose wisely. Research what is best for you. If you have a chronic or life threatening condition, don’t make changes without first discussing them with your doctor in order that your condition may be monitored. Well informed and supportive practitioners will support patients who want to take responsibility for their own health.

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