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CONDITIONS & TREATMENTS: ENDOMETRIOSIS

Endometriosis is a disease in which the endometrial tissue that makes up the lining of the uterus grows outside of the uterus. When this tissue implants and grows in the abdomen, it can cause cysts and scarring in the places where it is growing. It can bleed and cause pain, especially during a woman's period. Endometriosis can damage the ovaries, fallopian tubes, and even the bladder and bowel.

Endometriosis is associated with infertility. This may be because of the damage to the reproductive organs, but it also may be associated with problems inside the uterus that make it more difficult for an embryo to implant and grow there.

Although endometriosis is often seen in women between the ages of 25 and 44, it can also occur in teenagers. Teenagers that have severe pain with their periods should be evaluated for endometriosis. While doctors do not know exactly why this misplaced tissue growth occurs, they do know that a woman whose mother or sister suffers from endometriosis is more likely to have the disease.

Treatment options vary based on the severity of the disease, the age of the woman, and her reproductive plans. Medications can be given to suppress menses and reduce the long-term damage from endometriosis. Surgery is sometimes necessary to verify the diagnosis, remove the endometrial implants, repair damage to organs, and reduce the pain from endometriosis. Sometimes medical treatments or surgery are used to improve a patient's response to infertility therapies.

When the pain from endometriosis is severe, women who do not wish to have more children may opt for a hysterectomy. However, less invasive treatments such as ovarian suppression with continuous oral contraceptives or other hormone therapies are often successful in reducing the pain. Careful evaluation for other causes of pelvic pain is also important. Many women with endometriosis also suffer from irritable bowel syndrome, which also can cause pelvic pain similar to that of endometriosis.