

# Raising Awareness of Endometriosis and Cardiovascular Disease

GA OB/GYN Society and North Georgia Heart Foundation

As Gynecologists, we are familiar with the variety of complications that can arise from a diagnosis of endometriosis. This condition can be extremely debilitating and painful for women, and seen mostly in those of reproductive age. But are we doing enough to ensure that endometriosis patients are aware of their increased risk for developing cardiovascular disease? The Georgia Obstetrical and Gynecology Society (GOGS) is partnering with the North Georgia Heart Foundation<sup>1</sup> to raise awareness of the association between endometriosis and cardiovascular disease. According to a study released in March 2016 and published in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*, women of reproductive age with endometriosis are 200% more likely to develop cardiovascular disease than women without. The study compared women with endometriosis to women without endometriosis over a 20 year period and found that women with the condition were:<sup>2</sup>

- 1.35 times more likely to need surgery or stenting to open blocked arteries;
- 1.52 times more likely to have a heart attack; and
- 1.91 times more likely to develop angina (chest pain).

These findings are alarming, as approximately 6-10% of women, about 5 million, of reproductive age in the U.S. have endometriosis, and cardiovascular disease remains the leading killer of women in Georgia and the U.S.<sup>3</sup> In fact, cardiovascular disease accounts for 1 in 4 deaths for women in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> From 2005-2014, almost 3,000 women in Georgia, age 18-44, died of cardiovascular disease. Further, in 2014, almost one-third of women over 18 in Georgia were obese, a prime predictor of cardiovascular disease.<sup>5</sup> According to Carla Roberts, M.D., Ph.D., an endometriosis expert, gynecological surgeon and the founding partner at Reproductive Surgical Specialists, Northside Hospital Healthcare System, Cumming, GA. the actual prevalence of endometriosis is likely higher. "Some women can have endometriosis and be asymptomatic," says Roberts. Currently, the only way to definitively diagnose endometriosis is through surgery. A 2011 National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

study found that approximately 11% of a selected group of women that were asymptomatic actually had endometriosis.<sup>6</sup> "Applied nationally," Roberts continues, "this could mean that the actual prevalence of endometriosis in women of childbearing age is closer to 20%." With endometriosis being a significant co-morbidity for cardiovascular disease in women of reproductive age and the rates of cardiovascular disease and high rates of associated cardiovascular co-morbidities for women in Georgia, we as gynecologists need to ensure that our patients with endometriosis are being educated about their risk of developing cardiovascular disease and are being closely followed to prevent its onset. For your patients with endometriosis, please closely monitor and advise on the following conditions and clinical parameters:

- Weight – a BMI of > 30 is obese and needs weight loss treatment. A BMI of 25-29 with just one risk factor also needs treatment
- Lipid and cholesterol panels - Ideally, the level of bad (LDL) cholesterol should be below 100 milligrams per deciliter of blood (mg/dL). It is considered high at 160 mg/dL. Statins will decrease the risk of heart disease. Bad cholesterol is considered high at 160 mg/dL.
- Blood Pressure –
  - Normal <120/80 mmHg
  - At Risk (pre-hypertension) 120-139/80-89 mmHg
  - High >140/90 mmHg
- Diabetes – maintain a HgA1C of < 7.0 %

Ensuring that these are in the normal range is critically important to reducing the risk for developing cardiovascular disease. In addition to clinical oversight, strongly communicate to your patients the importance of maintaining a heart healthy lifestyle. "About 80% of cardiovascular disease can be avoided with healthy behaviors," says Jeffery Marshall, MD, FACC, FSCAI, Heart Foundation founder and Medical Director of the Cardiac Cath Lab at Northeast Georgia Medical Center. "Therefore, it is critically important that we drive home those messages and ensure we are linking all of our patients, especially ones at increased risk for developing cardiovascular disease, with resources to help them begin and maintain the healthy habits." Recommendations to our patients should include:

1. Don't use tobacco products. If patients want help quitting tobacco, refer them to the Georgia Tobacco



Carla Roberts, MD, PhD

- Quitline (1-877-270-STOP).
  2. Obtain at least 150 minutes of aerobic exercise a week, or approximately 20 minutes daily. Encourage patients to take a 20-minute walk immediately following a meal.
  3. Consume fresh vegetables, lean meats, and foods low in sodium. Patients with or at elevated risk for developing cardiovascular disease should consume less than 2,300mg of sodium per day.<sup>7</sup>
- For more information on healthy lifestyle recommendations, visit:
- CDC Heart Disease Prevention (<http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/prevention.htm>)
  - Georgia Department of Public Health Chronic Disease Prevention (<https://dph.georgia.gov/heart-disease-prevention>)
  - United States Preventive Services Task Force: For Health Professionals (<http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/Page/Name/tools-and-resources-for-better-preventive-care>)
- With these tips and careful monitoring of all of our patients (remember: cardiovascular disease causes 25% of deaths in women each year), we can ensure our patients have a higher quality of life and better outcomes with endometriosis.

1 To learn more about the North Georgia Heart Foundation, please visit [www.pulseoftomorrow.org](http://www.pulseoftomorrow.org), or email Daniel Thompson at [dthompson@pulseoftomorrow.org](mailto:dthompson@pulseoftomorrow.org)

2 Science Daily. March 29, 2016. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/03/160329184943.htm>

3 NICHD. How many people are affected by or at risk for endometriosis? <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/endometri/conditioninfo/Pages/at-risk.aspx>

4 CDC. Women and Heart Disease Fact Sheet. [http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsdp/data\\_statistics/fact\\_sheets/fs\\_women\\_heart.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsdp/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fs_women_heart.htm)

5 Georgia OASIS. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS). <https://oasis.state.ga.us/oasis/brfss/qryBRFSS.aspx>

6 NICHD. How many people are affected by or at risk for endometriosis? <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/endometri/conditioninfo/Pages/at-risk.aspx>

7 CDC. Get the Facts: Sodium and the Dietary Guidelines. [http://www.cdc.gov/salt/pdfs/sodium\\_dietary\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/salt/pdfs/sodium_dietary_guidelines.pdf)