



PATIENT FACT SHEET

Endometriosis: Does It Cause Infertility?

This fact sheet was developed in collaboration with The Society of Reproductive Surgeons

When you get your period (menses) during your menstrual cycle, your body is getting rid of the tissue (endometrium) that lines your uterus (womb). If you have a condition called endometriosis, this tissue grows outside of your uterus and can be deposited on your ovaries, bladder, or bowel. Also, it can grow to develop into cysts that are filled with old blood and can be found in the ovaries or around the pelvic cavity. These blood filled cysts are called endometriomas.

The endometriosis tissue found in and around your pelvis behaves differently than the normal endometrium found in your uterus. Endometriosis tissue can shed and bleed during your period, which can cause irritation of your pelvic organs. Also, endometriosis can cause adhesions (scar tissue) that can form on your reproductive organs (uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries).

How do I know if I have endometriosis?

Sometimes, endometriosis can cause no symptoms. However, many women who have endometriosis experience painful periods and/or pain during sex. Uncommonly, endometriosis can attach to, and possibly, damage surrounding organs like your bowel, bladder, and ureter (the tube that goes from the kidney to the bladder), which can cause pain with bowel movements and/or urination.

If an office ultrasound demonstrates no potential cause of your pelvic pain, your doctor can determine if you have endometriosis by performing a minimally invasive surgical procedure called laparoscopy. The physician will look inside your pelvic cavity (belly) with a laparoscope (telescope attached to a camera), which is inserted through small incisions.

Does endometriosis cause infertility?

If you have endometriosis, it may be more difficult for you to become pregnant. Doctors are not entirely sure why that is. At the time of surgery, your doctor may evaluate the amount, location, and depth of endometriosis and give you a "score." This score determines whether your endometriosis is considered minimal, mild, moderate, or severe. The presence of scar tissue will worsen this score.

Women with moderate or severe endometriosis can have pelvic adhesions (scar tissue) or endometriomas. Doctors are certain that adhesions that block the fallopian tubes will prevent an egg from traveling normally from the ovary to the uterus. This makes it difficult for the egg and sperm to meet.

Minimal or mild endometriosis may only cause minimal amounts of adhesions, but becoming pregnant may still be difficult.

Can surgery help me get pregnant?

Remember that only through a surgical procedure called laparoscopy can your doctor determine for certain if you have endometriosis. If endometriosis is seen at the time of surgery, your doctor will surgically burn or laser the endometriosis and cut or remove the scar tissue. This treatment will allow your reproductive organs to function more normally. Your chances of becoming pregnant are improved after surgical treatment, especially if your endometriosis is in the moderate or severe range.

Can my endometriosis be treated with medication?

Endometriosis needs the female hormone estrogen to develop and grow. Birth control pills and other drugs that lower or block estrogen can help symptoms, such as pelvic pain, painful periods, and pain during sex.

For patients who want to become pregnant, medical therapy with birth control pills or medications that cause a short-term, menopausal state may be considered prior to attempts at conception. Though medical therapy may help to decrease the pain associated with endometriosis, this treatment usually does not improve pregnancy rates.