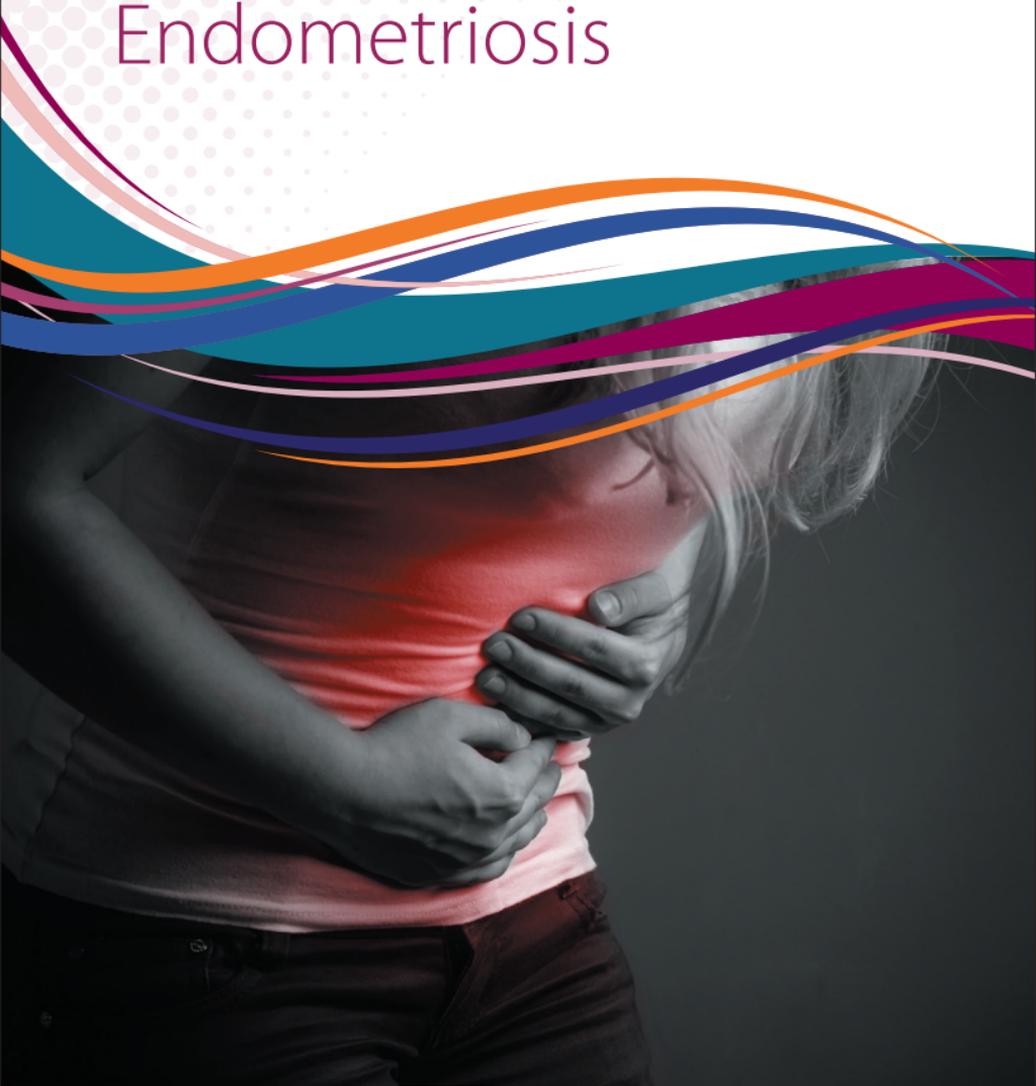


Endometriosis



Endometriosis is a common condition, affecting approximately 176 million women worldwide. It is defined as the presence of tissue, resembling the uterine lining (endometrium), outside of the womb. This tissue (endometriotic lesions) can be found anywhere but most commonly within the abdominal cavity.

Endometriosis may be associated with a number of symptoms, but some individuals can also be symptom free:

Pain is one of the most common symptoms

- Painful periods (dysmenorrhoea)
- Pain during sexual intercourse (dyspareunia)
- Pain during emptying of the bowels (dyschezia) and bladder (dysuria)

These symptoms are often more pronounced around the time of menstruation but may be continuous throughout the month.

Importantly, no correlation has been found between the severity of the pain/symptoms and the extent of the disease.

Making a diagnosis can be delayed and difficult, as the symptoms can be non-specific. An internal examination by a doctor, ultrasound scan of the pelvis, or a MRI scan can help to make the diagnosis. However, the current 'gold standard' method is through laparoscopy ('key hole surgery'), ideally with small samples taken ('biopsies') that are checked under the microscope.

25-40% of infertile women have some degree of endometriosis. This can impact: implantation; egg numbers; and tubal function. However, this does not mean that all women found to have endometriosis will have trouble conceiving. Once pregnant, it is unclear whether endometriosis has any negative effects on the outcome of the pregnancy but most proceed uneventfully.

Treatment should be tailored to your needs. The symptoms of endometriosis can be treated but this may not be a long-term cure. Drug treatments range from simple pain relief to hormonal manipulation (e.g. the combined pill, GnRH injections). Unfortunately, hormonal medications are not suitable if you are trying to conceive as they can have a contraceptive effect. Surgical treatment involves excising or cauterising the areas of endometriosis during keyhole surgery (laparoscopy).

A diagnosis of endometriosis should not prevent you from trying to conceive naturally especially if you are young and the extent of the endometriosis was classified as minimal or mild.