

## Endometriosis: A Common Cause of Pelvic Pain

Endometriosis occurs when the lining of the womb (endometrium) implants outside the uterus. It occurs in about 40% of women with infertility and 80% of women with chronic pelvic pain.

Unfortunately, many women suffer years with this condition without diagnosis or treatment. The cause is unknown, but it is more common in Asians and runs in families suggesting a genetic predisposition. It is usually seen among women between ages 25 and 35 years old, but can occur at any age.

Symptoms:

- \* pelvic, back, or flank pain before or during the menstrual period
- \* very painful menstrual cramps
- \* pain during sex
- \* abnormal or heavy menstrual flow
- \* painful bowel movements, diarrhea, constipation, or other intestinal problems
- \* painful urination or feeling the need to urinate often
- \* difficulty becoming pregnant.

After excluding other medical problems, the only way to definitively diagnose endometriosis is through a laparoscopy where a camera is placed through the belly button to look at the pelvis. An ultrasound can be done to identify an ovarian endometrioma (ovarian cyst filled with endometriosis).

Treatment depends on whether a woman's major concern is pain or infertility. Mild disease can be treated by medications such as ibuprofen and continuous birth control pills which can reduce menstrual bleeding and inflammation. Severe disease often requires surgical removal of endometriotic implants via laparoscopy and/or injection of Lupron that causes shrinkage of endometriosis by decreasing estrogen. Some patients require removal of the uterus, tubes, and ovaries to finally relieve pain.