

Endometriosis

What is Endometriosis?

Endometriosis is a medical condition in which endometrial cells (cells which line the inside cavity of the uterus) are found as implants outside of the uterus. These implants are found on the ovaries (sometimes as an ovarian cyst), on the surface of the uterus and fallopian tubes, and throughout the pelvis and abdomen.

What causes endometriosis?

There are several theories concerning the cause(s) of endometriosis. One of the most common is that some of the endometrial lining, which is shed during a menses, backs up through the fallopian tubes and spills into the pelvis and abdomen. This probably occurs in most women each cycle, but in some women these endometrial cells implant onto the surfaces in the pelvis and abdomen and lead to the inflammation and symptoms associated with endometriosis (see below).

What are the Symptoms of Endometriosis?

The most common symptoms are pelvic pain and infertility. The pelvic pain associated with endometriosis typically occurs during menses due to the inflammation of the endometriosis implants under the influence of hormonal changes. Scarring from the implants, especially on the fallopian tubes, can lead to infertility associated with endometriosis. Sometimes, women have no symptoms of endometriosis.

How common is Endometriosis?

It is estimated that 5-10% of all reproductive age women, 20-50% of reproductive age women with infertility, and 80% of women with chronic pelvic pain have endometriosis.

How is Endometriosis Diagnosed?

A thorough history and physical exam may suggest a diagnosis of endometriosis, but the only way to definitively diagnose it is with surgery. There is no blood test that shows endometriosis and no imaging technique (ultrasound, CT scan, etc) that can detect all implants. The implants have to be visualized (usually by laparoscopic surgery) in order to confirm a diagnosis of endometriosis.

What is an endometrioma?

An endometrioma is a collection of endometriosis on the ovary. It can usually be seen on a pelvic ultrasound and usually has a distinct appearance that can differentiate it from other types of ovarian cysts. The only definitive treatment for an endometrioma is removal by surgery. You can discuss the risks and benefits of removal with one of our specialists here at Pacific Northwest Fertility.

What are the treatments for Endometriosis?

Treatments involve either hormone medication to quiet the inflammation associated with the implants or surgical removal of the implants. The hormonal treatments for endometriosis usually interrupt ovulation and are not appropriate for patients who are trying to get pregnant.

For patients who have endometriosis and want to conceive, typically surgery and fertility treatments such as ovulation induction or IVF are the best options.

How can Pacific NW Fertility help me if I think I have Endometriosis?

The physicians at Pacific NW Fertility have specially trained in the treatment of endometriosis. We can diagnose and treat endometriosis with the most appropriate options for each patient.