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AN EXPERT GUIDE TO

Endometriosis and Fertility

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Welcome to your guide to endometriosis and fertility.

Every day, we hear from women who are suffering from endometriosis. It can be an extremely painful condition to live with, made all the more painful when trying to get pregnant. Although infertility is a common symptom of endometriosis, know that it is possible to get pregnant, and have a healthy pregnancy, even with an endometriosis diagnosis. We designed this guide to help you understand how exactly endometriosis will impact your fertility and steps you can take with your doctor to start the family you've always dreamed of.

XX,
Team Binto

What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis, although poorly understood, is a common disease that affects women of any race, age, or socioeconomic class. Around five million (or up to 10 percent) of women in the United States have endometriosis.

The name endometriosis is derived from the word "endometrium," which is the tissue that lines your womb, or uterus. It occurs when this tissue starts growing on the outside of your uterus, as well as other parts of your body where it should not be growing.

Endometriosis is often found on the fallopian tubes, ovaries and outer surfaces of the uterus. It can occasionally grow in other areas on the body, like your cervix, vagina, bladder, rectum or vulva. It is rare to find it on areas like your skin, lungs or brain.

Symptoms of Endometriosis

Endometriosis can manifest at any time between your first period through menopause. Pain is the most common symptom of endometriosis, usually in your lower back, abdomen, and pelvic areas. The amount of endometriosis you have is not linked with how much pain you are experiencing. While some women may experience severe pain (usually when there is scarring or the affected areas are large), others might not experience any at all. Unfortunately, some women who only have small areas affected by this disease may still experience severe pain. Symptoms may include:

- Disabling or extremely painful period cramps
- Bleeding or spotting between periods
- Heavy periods
- Pain during or after sex
- Painful urination or bowel movements during menstrual periods
- Intestinal pain
- Pelvic or lower back pain
- Infertility

MANY WOMEN GO UNDIAGNOSED. It's fairly common for women to experience these symptoms for years before receiving an endometriosis diagnosis. They often believe the pain is associated with their period and attempt to just cope with it.

Causes of Endometriosis

Although researchers are looking into potential causes of endometriosis, there are no definitive known causes for it as of yet. Some researchers suspect that possible causes could be related to menstrual period flow problems, such as retrograde menstruation where the lining of your womb flows through your fallopian tubes backwards and into your stomach rather than exiting your body during your period.

Another possible and suspected cause is genetics. It's thought that you can inherit this disease in your genes if it runs in your family. If you have a faulty immune system, it may not be locating and destroying the tissue growing on the outer surface of your uterus.

Additionally, your hormones and hormone levels, particularly estrogen may play a role in promoting the disease. Finally, if you have had abdominal surgery, like a hysterectomy or Cesarean (C-section), the endometrial tissue could have been mistakenly gathered up and moved. This tissue has appeared on abdominal scars, for instance.

How Endometriosis Affects Fertility

If you have this disease, you might be finding it more difficult to become pregnant. Up to 40 percent of women have experienced female infertility with endometriosis. In fact, it's believed to be one of the three main reasons for women becoming infertile.

Endometriosis affects fertility in a number of ways, including:

- Altering the functioning of your immune system
- Impairing implantation of a pregnancy
- Causing pelvic structure inflammation
- Altering egg quality
- Causing scarred fallopian tubes
- Causing adhesions
- Distorting your pelvis' anatomy

Managing Endometriosis

There currently is no specific cure for endometriosis; however, there are treatments available, including birth control, hormone therapy, pain medications, and surgery.

If you are using in vitro fertilization (IVF) in an attempt to conceive, the combination of medical and surgical therapy may help. Each patient is different, thus your treatment plan will be individualized specifically for you.

What Can You Do About Endometriosis and Fertility?

There have been many women with this disease that still became pregnant. Yet, you may personally find conceiving to be difficult. If you are trying to get pregnant, you should consult with your doctor. He or she may advise you to have unprotected sex for up to a year before attempting any further treatment. This does depend on how old you are and the amount of pain you are experiencing. If you do not become pregnant during this year, your doctor will sit down with you to discuss possible endometriosis treatments and ways to improve fertility.

SOURCES:

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