ENDOMETRIOSIS & FERTILITY

WHAT IS ENDOMETRIOSIS AND WHY DOES IT AFFECT FERTILITY?

Endometriosis is an immune related chronic inflammatory disease. Endometrial Cells (from the lining of the uterus) migrate to other areas of the peritoneal cavity such as the bladder, bowels and ovary to name a few common places. It can present as lesions, adhesions, scar tissue and cysts which can all bleed and create mucus, depending on the stage of the endometriosis. The bleeding and mucus creates an inflammatory environment and immunological response which has been implicated in unexplained infertility.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MY FERTILITY?

Studies show that women with endometriosis tend to have a lower monthly pregnancy chance than women whose infertility has no known cause. The more advanced endometriosis is, the lower the pregnancy chance. Women with endometriosis will also have a lower rate of implantation after IVF than women with a healthy pelvis. However studies show that removing endometriosis by surgery increases the overall pregnancy rate. Women with endometriosis are also shown to have higher levels of endometrial bacteria which may affect implantation.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ENDOMETRIOSIS?

Endometriosis can present 'silently' or with symptoms which could include:
Shoulder and/or back pain
Shortness of Breath
Painful periods and /or painful sex
Heavy Periods
Pain anytime of the month
Painful urination and/or urinary urgency
Fatigue
Bloating
Constipation and/or Diarrhoea
Painful Bowel Movements
Nausea/Vomiting
Depression

ENDOMETRIOSIS AND INFLAMMATION

Essentially Endometriosis is an inflammatory condition and if you can understand the contributory factors to that inflammation and start to reduce it then you will go someway to improving your fertility. The inflammation is what creates the symptoms listed above but you may put your symptoms down to other factors, tiredness and fatigue are 'common' and as women are are educated that painful period are 'normal' however if you are experiencing any of the symptoms listed above and are struggling to conceive, then it may well be endometriosis. In order to get a diagnosis you will need an MRI or a surgical procedure called a laparoscopy, it cannot be diagnosed on ultrasound unless it is present on the ovaries where it presents as a blood filled cyst.

ENDOMETRIOSIS & FERTILITY

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY CHANCE OF A HEALTHY PREGNANCY WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS?



Studies show that over 80% of women with endometriosis have high levels of pathogenic bacterias in the endometrium, vagina and gut, such as Streptococcus and E Coli and lower levels of protective Lactobacillus. Bacteria creates inflammation and by treating these bacterias and improving the microbiome you can create a healthier and more fertile environment. Bacteria can also be transferred to male partners and affect sperm health. So undergoing vaginal, gut or endometrial microbiome testing can be the first step to improving your fertility.

WAYS TO SUPPORT YOUR MICROBIOME

If you have pathogenic bacteria diagnosed via microbiome testing, then often a course of targeted antibiotics prescribed by a specialist can be the best course of action to address the nasties. However, it's important this is followed up with probiotics and best practices to ensure your microbiome can remain optimal for fertility.

Consider a probiotic that contains 'Lactobacillus Crispatus' which creates the most protective environment for the endometrium and vagina

Avoid wearing thongs and ensure all sex toys & menstrual cups are thoroughly cleaned and sterilised

Eat a diet that contains plenty of fibre and ensure you empty your bowels daily to help clear toxins and balance hormones

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Supporting the gut will help to support how your body metabolises oestrogen which can be an issue in endometriosis but there are other ways you can also support this. Ensuring your thyroid is functioning normally will also mean you metabolise oestrogen better, so ensure you get this checked. It's also critical to make sure that you are exercising and getting enough sleep. Diet plays a huge role which we will also discuss in more detail next.

ENDOMETRIOSIS & FERTILITY

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DIET FOR ENDOMETRIOSIS

Studies show us that a diet that is high in fruits, vegetables and omega 3 and lower in red meats and alcohol will reduce the risk of endometriosis overall. Fibre is key so eating fruits and vegetables with the skin on, rather than juicing, is optimal. Foods that are colourful are high in phytonutrients that have been shown to have an anti-inflammatory affect on the body.Aim for a good variety of between 8-10 servings per day.

Studies also show that a large number of women who suffer with endometriosis will suffer with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) symptoms often down to Small Intestine Bacterial Overgrowth (SIBO). Aim for one healthy bowel movement a day and if you are still struggling with IBS symptoms such as changeable bowels and bloating then consult a nutritionist for testing and diagnosis.

If you google, you may find advice regarding diets such as the autoimmune paleo diet (AIP) or suggestions that going gluten and dairy free will help. Whilst these diets can certainly reduce inflammation, It is important that you do this under the guidance of a nutritionist or functional medicine practitioner. Not only will you know you are doing it right but also you will have the support that is necessary when making such big changes to your diet.

Eliminating convenience foods is often a good place to start when overhauling your diet. Avoid eating late and night and over eating and don't skip meals either. Focus on good quality, fresh whole produce and reduce the amount of processed foods you eat.



KEY SUPPLEMENTS FOR ENDOMETRIOSIS

Omega 3 - EPA & DHA are anti-inflammatory, try and get as much as you can from food sources such as sardines, mackerel and salmon.

NAC - Helps to increase your glutathione, a key antioxidant, aim for 1500mg daily.

Vitamin C & E - Antioxidants that have been shown to reduce pelvic pain in endometriosis

Magnesium - Helps muscles to relax and aids healthy bowel movements and hormone balance

ENDOMETRIOSIS & FERTILITY

FURTHER SUPPORT FOR YOUR FERTILITY WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS

There are lots of things you can do to support your endometriosis and calm inflammation, which will help with both your fertility and your symptoms. Everyone is different so we recommend you try them and see how you get on, some will work better for you than others so just give them a go! When you are looking after the other factors we discussed as well then they can have a very complimentary effect. We have linked some recommendations below.

Castor Oil Packs

Reduces local inflammation and symptoms such as pain and bloating. It can also help detoxification and hormone balance.

Acupuncture

This has been shown to improve oxygenated blood flow to the pelvic cavity, reduce pain and modulate the immune system

Reflexology

Working on the nervous system which can help to calm pain and manage anxiety and stress.

SHOULD I CONSIDER SURGERY FOR MY ENDOMETRIOSIS TO IMPROVE MY CHANCE OF A HEALTHY PREGNANCY?

Evidence shows that surgery for endometriosis improves the chance of a healthy pregnancy, however surgery is not for everyone and it can create further complications such as scar tissue. We recommend you consider the following when deciding whether to have surgery.

Consider excision over ablation as this is the only way to completely remove deep infiltrating endometriosis and best way to improve fertility.

Make sure your surgeon is very experienced, especially if they are removing endometriosis from your ovaries as this can reduce your ovarian reserve if not done by an expert.

