

# ALL ABOUT YOUR PERIOD

## Endometriosis



Department  
of Health

Do you have severe pain with your period? Pain that's so bad you can't do the things you normally do? Needing some downtime is normal, but your period shouldn't make you feel so bad that you end up in bed for hours. If it does, you might have a menstrual (period) health condition. You can get help for this.

### What is endometriosis? *pronounced en-doh-mee-tree-oh-sis*

The lining of your uterus, or endometrium, is made up of special tissue. Along with blood, this tissue leaves your body during your period.

When this tissue grows outside the uterus – in other words, in places it doesn't belong – the condition is called endometriosis. Hormones that bring on your period also affect this misplaced tissue. It can make your period very painful. Endometriosis can also make it difficult to get pregnant.

### What causes endometriosis?

This condition is common – about one in 10 people who have periods have endometriosis. People with close family members who have this condition are more likely to get it, but doctors are not sure what causes it. Endometriosis may start soon after a person gets their first period, or it may start when they're older. Many people are not diagnosed for years, partly because people expect their periods to hurt.

### What are the symptoms?

Some people with endometriosis have no symptoms at all. For others, endometriosis can be very painful or uncomfortable. Endometriosis may cause:

- Severe menstrual cramps. These cramps don't get better even when you take medicine like ibuprofen, also known as Advil® or Motrin®, and others. Severe menstrual cramps also don't get better even if you take naproxen – Aleve®, Anaprox®, Naprosyn®, and others. Your cramps may be so bad that you can't do things you normally do, like go to school or take a walk.
- Pelvic pain lasting at least six months: menstrual cramps but not always during a period.
- Pain during bowel movements and/or peeing: usually during your period.
- Diarrhea and/or constipation during your period.
- Pain with sex.

### How is endometriosis treated?

Health care providers usually try to help with medicine for your symptoms before they are sure that the problem is endometriosis. Surgery is the only way for your health care provider to know you have endometriosis. It doesn't show up on X-rays. It doesn't show up on ultrasound. Ultrasound is a test that uses sound waves. It creates pictures of your body's structures, such as your organs. To help you feel better, your health care provider may recommend:

#### Pain medicine

Certain pain medicines can make cramps feel better. These include ibuprofen, such as Advil® or Motrin®, and naproxen, such as Aleve®. Talk to a health care provider about the best way to take any medicine.

#### Hormonal birth control or other hormonal medicine

Some types of birth control work by using hormones that travel through your bloodstream to tell your organs that it's time to do something. Even though it's called "birth control," medicines like the birth control pill have other uses, too. They can make a person's period lighter, with less blood flow and pain. There are many forms of hormonal medicine. Your health care provider will decide if one is right for you.

#### Surgery and follow-up treatment

If other methods do not bring you enough relief, your health care provider may recommend surgery to remove the endometrial tissue that is in the wrong place. Surgery usually helps to take the pain away. Endometrial tissue can grow back, though. For this reason, health care providers will usually recommend hormonal treatments after surgery.

## **When should I talk to my health care provider about endometriosis?**

If you have any of these symptoms, see your health care provider. The sooner you start looking for help, the sooner you can start feeling better!

Prepare for your appointment by keeping track of your symptoms. Write down what is happening, when, and for how long. Take your notes to your appointment. To diagnose any menstrual condition, a health care provider needs to know exactly what is happening each month.

## **Need to find a health care provider?**

Ask for help from a trusted adult, parent, guardian, or school nurse. If you or your family need health insurance, call New York State of Health at 1-855-355-5777.

This handout is part of the “All About Your Period” series on menstrual health. For more information and helpful resources, visit: <https://health.ny.gov/TeenHealth>.