



Pelvic pain?

Could you have Endometriosis?

The week beginning March 8 is Endometriosis Awareness Week – so Idai Makaya thought it pertinent to help publicise this by making it the focus of the first Healthcare Matters article of this month.

ENDOMETRIOSIS is a reasonably common gynaecological condition – potentially affecting up to one in every 10 women.

Although of lower prevalence than many other well-known medical conditions, endometriosis appears to create a disproportionately large burden on medical and healthcare services because of its long-term persistent nature, because of the pain it often causes and also because of the fact that so many women who are afflicted with the condition are not aware that they have it (and are, thus, unaware that it may be the main cause of the various other health and fertility-related issues which those women may be experiencing).

Hopefully, by confirming or eliminating the diagnosis of endometriosis, many women will be better able to manage their health and wellbeing.

Women with endometriosis may

experience one or more of the following:

- Recurring pelvic pain, which is the most common symptom of endometriosis and can present as severe menstrual cramping, or even in the form of more diffuse pelvic pain in the regions around the waist (pain which can be periodic or even constant).
- Pain when using the loo.
- Sexually-related pain.
- Infertility.

In addition to those commonly experienced symptoms, which can sometimes make life feel unbearable for the women affected, many patients with endometriosis feel a sense of isolation, uncertainty, depression and anger which can lead onto psychological problems.

To get further insight into the treatment options for endometriosis I spoke to Andrew Hextall – a consultant gynaecologist based in Hertfordshire who treats numerous patients from North London, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Q & A

Idai Makaya: Mr Hextall, thanks for agreeing to assist in the publicising of Endometriosis Awareness Week. To commence our discussion, what is endometriosis?

Andrew Hextall: The endometrium is the inner lining of the womb which bleeds each month when a woman has a period.

Endometriosis is a condition where the lining cells also grow outside of the womb – most typically on the walls of the pelvis or ovaries. This can cause a variety of problems, including painful periods, pelvic pain, discomfort on intercourse and infertility.

Q Which women are most at risk of developing endometriosis?

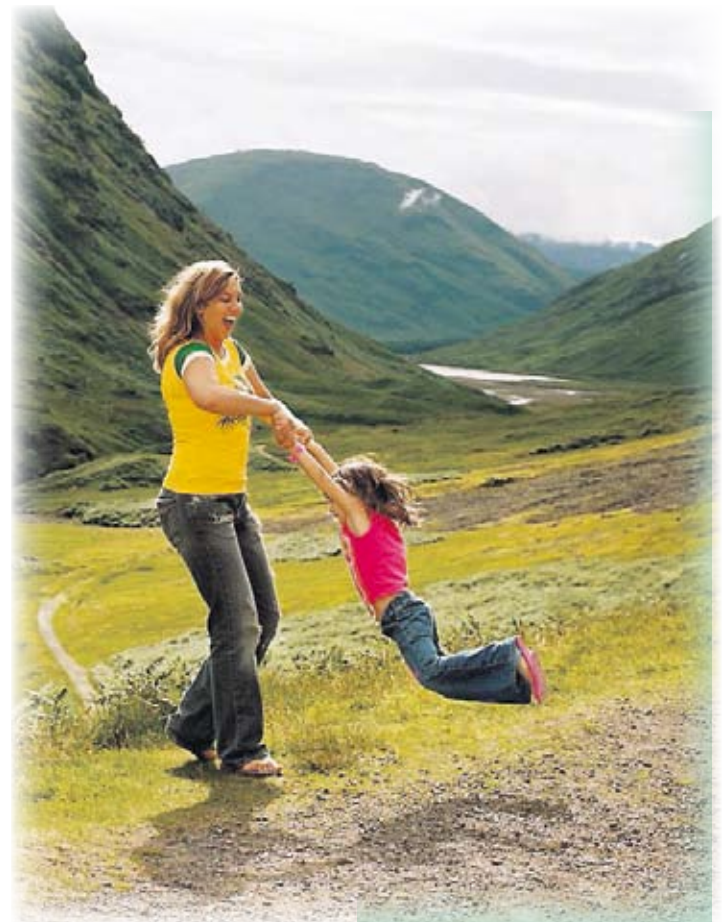
A It is most commonly diagnosed in patients who have not had any children and those with period problems or pelvic discomfort. However, endometriosis can affect all women of childbearing age – regardless of race or ethnicity.

Q Can endometriosis be avoided or prevented?

A It is impossible to catch (or give yourself) endometriosis. No one is 100% sure what causes this condition, although there are lots of theories. It is probably less common in women who take the contraceptive pill or in those who have had children – although endometriosis can still affect these patients.

Q Now that we've highlighted the symptoms, how can women find out whether or not they have endometriosis?

A Your GP will be happy to offer advice about



the likelihood of having this condition - based on your symptoms and possibly an examination. He may start you on simple treatments or refer you to a gynaecologist, who will most likely recommend a procedure called a laparoscopy (where a small camera is passed through the belly button while under anaesthetic).

Q What are the available treatments for endometriosis?

A Many women with painful periods find that simple pain killers help. Often patients also benefit from hormonal treatments – such as the contraceptive pill. If this is not effective then it may be necessary for a gynaecologist to laser or remove the endometriosis using keyhole surgery.

A local endometriosis support group will also be of great value to many women and is a tremendous source of information and advice - please visit www.endometriosis-uk.org to find out about local meetings.

Regarding the local patient groups Mr Hextall has mentioned, I am aware that a local coffee morning is taking place at the St Albans NHS Hospital Postgraduate Centre on Saturday, March 6 from 10.30am to 12.30pm and

there will also be a routine patient group meeting on Wednesday, March 31, at 7pm, at the same venue.

Any readers who would like to learn more about the local endometriosis support group are welcome to attend those events

In addition, Mr Hextall and the St Albans Endometriosis Support Group's Jo Greenbank will be giving presentations on endometriosis at the Spire Harpenden Hospital on Thursday, March 11 at 7.30 pm. There will also be a question and answer session after their presentations.

I hope readers use Endometriosis Awareness Week to get more informed about endometriosis and I hope that this article is of some help to women who may not have known about the condition and may be having symptoms similar to the ones we've discussed – so they can confirm or eliminate endometriosis as a potential cause and get the appropriate help they need.

■ The content of this article is provided for general information only and should not be treated as a substitute for the professional medical advice of your doctor or other health care professional.

The views expressed are those of the columnist and guest contributors and do not represent any particular organisation or clinical body.

Find out the facts about endometriosis



Free Information Evening

Endometriosis affects approximately 10% of women. Discover the facts from a Consultant Gynaecologist and learn more about the treatment options available.

Join us at our free information evening

Thursday 11 March at 7.30pm

An informal presentation will be followed by a question and answer session.

For further information or to reserve your place(s) please call or email:

01582 714 420

cservice-hp@spirehealthcare.com
www.spirehealthcare.com/harpenden



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■ To learn more about endometriosis you can contact Mr Andrew Hextall, consultant gynaecologist, at Spire Harpenden Hospital on www.spirehealthcare.com/harpenden or 01582 714420.

■ You can also visit the Endometriosis UK website at www.endometriosis-uk.org

■ Hertfordshire residents can email the St Albans Endometriosis Patient Support Group on stalbandsendo@gmail.com – or phone them on 07967 683258.