



ENDOMETRIOSIS PAIN & MINDFULNESS FACT SHEET

DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE

Period pain that impacts your ability to live life is not normal and could be a sign of endometriosis.

If you suffer from pain that prevents you from working, seeing friends, or interferes with your ability to just live life, then speak to your doctor about endometriosis. Know that there's hope.

DID YOU KNOW...

ACCORDING TO THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION, ENDOMETRIOSIS AFFECTS AN ESTIMATED 10% (ROUGHLY 200 MILLION) OF WOMEN, GIRLS AND THOSE ASSIGNED FEMALE AT BIRTH WORLDWIDE – MAKING IT MORE COMMON THAN ASTHMA, DIABETES, OR BREAST CANCER.

GLOBALLY, IT TAKES AN AVERAGE OF 7-9 YEARS FROM SYMPTOM ONSET BEFORE A PERSON IS DIAGNOSED WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS.



DESPITE ITS PREVALENCE, ENDOMETRIOSIS IS OFTEN MISDIAGNOSED OR UNDIAGNOSED, LEADING TO DELAYS IN TREATMENT AND MANAGEMENT, ESPECIALLY FOR LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS, TRANS MEN, NON-BINARY INDIVIDUALS, PEOPLE OF COLOUR, AND THOSE LIVING IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES.

DESPITE THE MANY CHALLENGES OF THIS ILLNESS, YOU CAN STILL MANAGE IT AND LIVE A BEAUTIFUL LIFE IN SPITE OF IT.

TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR ENDOMETRIOSIS INCLUDE PELVIC FLOOR PHYSIOTHERAPY, HORMONAL THERAPIES (BIRTH CONTROL), PAIN MEDICATIONS, TENS DEVICE, ACUPUNCTURE, SURGERY, PSYCHOLOGICAL TOOLS (MEDITATION & MINDFULNESS) AND LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS (DIET & GENTLE EXERCISE).

SUPPORT AND COMMUNITY ARE ALSO CRUCIAL FOR INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS.

ENDOMETRIOSIS IS A CHRONIC AND DEBILITATING ILLNESS. IT OCCURS WHEN TISSUE SIMILAR TO THE LINING OF THE UTERUS GROWS OUTSIDE OF THE UTERUS, LEADING TO INFLAMMATION, WHICH OFTEN CAUSES SEVERE PAIN.

ENDOMETRIOSIS CAN ALSO CAUSE SCAR TISSUE AND ADHESIONS TO FORM IN THE PELVIS AND OTHER REGIONS IN THE BODY. IT HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED IN NEARLY ALL ORGANS IN THE BODY.

SYMPTOMS OF ENDOMETRIOSIS CAN VARY, BUT OFTEN INCLUDE DEBILITATING PELVIC PAIN, PAINFUL PERIODS, HEAVY BLEEDING, PAINFUL INTERCOURSE, CHRONIC FATIGUE, ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, PAINFUL BOWEL MOVEMENTS, IBS-LIKE ISSUES, PAINFUL URINATION, AND INFERTILITY.

ENDOMETRIOSIS CAN HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON QUALITY OF LIFE, CAUSING PHYSICAL DISCOMFORT AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS – OFTEN INTERFERING WITH DAILY ACTIVITIES.

“Life with endometriosis can be incredibly challenging, but with the right tools, it becomes a small shadow in our lives, rather than something we constantly live in fear of...”

WHILE THE EXACT CAUSE OF ENDOMETRIOSIS IS UNKNOWN, FACTORS SUCH AS GENETICS, HORMONAL IMBALANCES, AND IMMUNE SYSTEM DYSFUNCTION MAY PLAY A ROLE IN ITS DEVELOPMENT.

WHILE SURGERY AND OTHER TREATMENTS CAN MANAGE AND/OR SUPPRESS SYMPTOMS, THERE IS NO KNOWN CURE FOR ENDOMETRIOSIS.



HOW CAN UNDERSTANDING PAIN HELP MY ENDOMETRIOSIS?

Learning about how pain works can help you understand that pain is not solely caused by physical tissue damage, but is also influenced by emotional, psychological, and social factors too.

It's an extremely complex phenomenon that's influenced by the nervous system – meaning stress can be a big factor in how badly we feel it. **Understanding how your nervous system influences pain signals can empower you to engage in activities and practices that positively manage your personal pain triggers, such as deep breathing techniques, mindful activities, and physical activity.**

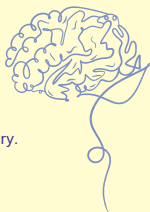
This understanding can help you develop strategies to address the pain triggers in your life and reduce pain perception. **In fact, studies show that individuals who simply learned about how their pain works reported significant reductions in their pain experience.**

WHAT IS PAIN?

Pain is your body's warning system – it alerts you to do something when you are injured. For example, if you break your ankle while running, pain is the brain's response to get you to stop what you're doing and take care of the injury. This type of shorter-term pain is known as acute pain.

Chronic pain is when you've had on-going pain for at least 3 months. Over time, your brain concludes that it needs to always protect you from danger that it senses in the body. It protects by cranking up the volume on the pain.

It's important to remember that **pain is ALWAYS real.** Even if there's no tissue damage, **the brain ultimately decides whether something hurts or not, every time.**



WHAT IS CENTRAL SENSITISATION?

Central sensitisation is a process in which the central nervous system becomes hypersensitive to pain, leading to increased pain perception and decreased pain tolerance.

It occurs from repeated exposure to chronic pain, leading to abnormal pain processing in the brain and spinal cord. The on-going exposure endo warriors have on a monthly basis to severe and debilitating pain literally causes the brain to change and react more aggressively with pain signals – all in an honest attempt to help you.

Sadly, central sensitisation is a very common occurrence for endo warriors, even if your pain hasn't become definitively 'chronic'. **It can also explain why some do not find relief following a successful surgery. The brain has changed.**

WHY IS MY BRAIN GETTING IT SO WRONG?

It may seem counterintuitive, but your brain's reactions are to help you and keep you safe from threats it's detecting in your body. However, it's now *overreacting* because of how persistent the threat has been.

An easy way to understand this is to think of your body as a car with an overactive alarm system. Most cars require someone to break into them for the alarm to sound.

For your car (body), **it feels like it's constantly being broken into. As a result, it becomes hyperalert and hypervigilant to pain, and even just a small leaf falling on the hood (or slight bloating) will send the alarm signals screaming.**



CAN I REVERSE CENTRAL SENSITISATION?

Absolutely. It can take time, but it's important to know that the brain is malleable and capable of changing. We can use this to our advantage to reshape it – allowing neuroplasticity to work its magic and create sustained change. This is the same way it adapted to protect you from your endometriosis, just in the reverse order.

Through meditation and mindfulness strategies, you can reprogram your brain's pain response to be less reactive. Over time, your relationship with pain will change significantly as you redefine how your brain interprets and responds to the body's signals. In some cases, it can take that excruciating, doubled-over stabbing sensation down to nothing.

Several studies have shown that participants who undertook a daily mindfulness meditation practice either significantly reduced or eliminated their endometriosis pain entirely (even after other medical interventions didn't work). This has also been shown in countless other studies for other forms of chronic pain.

HOW DO MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS INFLUENCE PAIN?

Meditation cultivates a state of mindfulness (present-moment awareness), which involves adopting a non-judgemental and accepting attitude towards present-moment experiences. This means that instead of fearing pain, we turn towards it with curiosity and self-compassion.

When applied to pain, mindfulness allows individuals to acknowledge the pain sensations without negatively evaluating them, thereby decreasing emotional reactivity and the subsequent pain cycle that follows. **Again, this takes time, but the more often we practice it, the stronger the neural rewiring will become through the power of neuroplasticity.**

WHAT ARE THE BEST MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TOOLS TO HELP MANAGE MY PAIN?

Pain research shows that there are several key psychological tools required to help manage pain and provide relief, particularly for individuals with chronic, debilitating pain – like endometriosis. These tools include:

- **Self-Compassion and Validation** – Recognising the immense unfairness of living with this illness, on top of everything else life is throwing at you.
- **Empowerment** – Seeing your incredible strength and resilience, despite the many hardships of living with endometriosis.
- **Attentional Control** – Tuning out of the pain and distracting the brain elsewhere (this can be in your body or environment).
- **Non-Judgemental Awareness** – Tuning into the pain with a neutral curiosity for the sensations, recognising their impermanence and how they change moment to moment.
- **Breath Work** – Breathing into the pain and tension, thereby releasing muscle tension and stress in the pelvic floor and affected areas.
- **Visualisation** – Since our brain requires so much effort to process visual stimuli, visualisation not only distracts from the discomfort, but also forces the brain to process imagery instead of pain. Over time, this neuroplasticity can transform the neurons that cause chronic pain so they're used for other things, which greatly decreases the feeling of pain.
- **Stress Management** – Knowing your pain triggers and subsequent safety mechanisms (i.e., recognising your 'Danger in Me' and 'Safety in Me' triggers aka DIMs and SIMs).



HELPFUL RESOURCES

Video: TEDx 'Why Things Hurt', Dr G. Lorimer Moseley -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwd-wLdIHjs>

Video Modules: Pain Explained, Dr Adele Stewart -
<https://adelestewartmbi.com/services/pain-explained/>

Book: The Brain's Way of Healing, Dr Norman Doidge -
https://normandoidge.com/?page_id=1042

Book: Explain Pain: Protectometer, Dr G. Lorimer Moseley & Dr David S. Butler -
<https://www.noigroup.com/product/ep-handbook-protectometer/>

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