

## Patient information factsheet

# Your diet and endometriosis

We have given you this factsheet because you have been diagnosed with endometriosis. It explains what endometriosis is and how changes in your diet can help you manage its symptoms. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

### What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis is a condition where cells similar to those in the lining of the womb (uterus) grow in other parts of the body. It can affect organs such as the bladder and bowel. Sometimes, endometriosis is found in areas outside the pelvis, such as in the chest.

### What are the symptoms of endometriosis?

You might have symptoms during your period, such as:

- severe period pain that stops you doing your usual activities
- very heavy bleeding that soaks through pads or tampons every 1 to 2 hours.

You can also have other symptoms, such as:

- pain in your lower tummy and back
- pain when you pee or poo
- pain during or after sex
- extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- pain or bleeding in other areas, such as in the chest, which may cause shortness of breath and coughing up blood.

You may also find it more difficult to get pregnant and have low mood or anxiety.

Some people with endometriosis have more irritable-bowel-type symptoms, while others struggle more with painful bladder symptoms.

### Can changes in diet help improve symptoms of endometriosis?

There is some evidence that changes in your diet could help relieve symptoms caused by endometriosis. More research needs to be done because it is a condition that affects women differently. There is no 'one size fits all' answer, but changes in your diet can be a healthy, natural way to help improve your symptoms.

**If you have irritable-bowel-type symptoms**, an elimination diet (cutting out foods for at least two weeks and then adding them back in slowly) can help you work out which foods trigger your bowel symptoms. You can then avoid the foods that cause problems. Keeping a food and symptom diary can be helpful.

There are two main triggers with irritable bowel symptoms: soluble and insoluble fibres. The type of fibre you may need to avoid depends on the type of irritable bowel symptoms you struggle with (for example, constipation, bloating and pain, or diarrhoea).

You can find more information about irritable bowel syndrome under the 'Useful links' section of this factsheet.

**If you struggle more with painful bladder symptoms**, you should limit foods that can irritate your bladder, such as acidic foods, alcohol, caffeinated or fizzy drinks, spicy foods, chocolate, and certain fruits – especially berries and tomatoes.

## **Avoid foods that can cause inflammation**

Short-term inflammation (acute inflammation) is a normal way for your body to protect itself against infection or injury, but long-term inflammation (chronic inflammation) can worsen diseases such as endometriosis. Because of this, it is important to avoid or limit foods that may increase inflammation in the body. These foods include:

- alcohol
- caffeine (from coffee or colas)
- gluten (from wheat, barley, and rye)
- red and processed meats
- saturated and trans fats
- deep-fried foods
- high-sugar foods (sweets and desserts)
- refined carbohydrates (bread, pastry, and other products made with flour)
- overly processed foods (that have had fibre and other nutrients removed)
- dairy products (for some people)

## **What should I eat?**

**Fruit** such as berries (raspberries, blueberries, strawberries), peaches, oranges, pink grapefruit, red grapes, plums, blackberries, cherries, apples, and pears. They are rich in anthocyanins (a substance in fruits that gives them their colour), a natural antioxidant with anti-inflammatory effects. Aim to eat fruits of different colours to get a wide range of nutrients.

**Vegetables**, especially cruciferous and dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale, broccoli, cabbage, bok choy, cauliflower, sprouts and washed raw salad greens. These contain sulforaphane, a natural antioxidant that helps reduce inflammation. Try to make a plate that has a variety of vegetables for a good mix of vitamins.

**Nuts** and seeds such as chia seeds, avocado, pecans, walnuts, almonds, ground flaxseed, and natural peanut butter. They're full of healthy omega-3 fats that help reduce inflammation.

**Beans and legumes** such as chickpeas, black-eyed peas, lentils, black beans, kidney beans, and soybeans. These help reduce inflammation and cholesterol and keep your blood sugar levels stable.

**Fish and seafood** such as salmon, herring, sardines, black cod and mackerel. These are excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids which reduce inflammation.

**Eggs** are a nutrient-dense source of protein. They are rich in choline, which supports liver health. The liver helps break down excess hormones and toxins that can cause inflammation. Choose free-range eggs where possible, as they often contain more omega-3 and vitamin D.

**Lean poultry** such as skinless chicken and turkey. This is a good source of high-quality protein. It's useful when eaten in moderation and served with plenty of colourful vegetables.

**Tea**, especially green tea, peppermint and chamomile. Green tea contains epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), an anti-inflammatory substance. Peppermint has been shown to have antioxidant properties and can help with digestion, especially after meals.

**Dark chocolate** is packed with the flavanols, antioxidants known to reduce inflammation. The darker the chocolate, the better. Choose chocolate with at least 70% cocoa for the most benefits.

**Whole grains** including gluten-free noodles and pasta, brown rice, basmati rice, wild rice, buckwheat, quinoa, and oats. They help to reduce inflammation, support gut health, and reduce blood sugar spikes. However, having too many grains can cause spikes in your blood sugar. Keep your portion sizes moderate and pair with protein, vegetables, and healthy fats.

**Turmeric** contains an anti-inflammatory compound called 'curcumin'.

If you feel you need a snack between meals, choose low-sugar and nutrient-rich options such as:

- a few unsalted nuts or seeds
- a boiled egg
- carrot sticks or baby carrots
- cucumber or celery with hummus
- a few berries
- a couple of squares of 70% dark chocolate

## What else can I do to manage my symptoms?

**Keep a food journal.** Pay attention to how your body reacts to different foods. Keeping a journal of the foods you eat and any symptoms can help you spot triggers. Finding what works for you takes some trial and error. This takes time and commitment, but it can be worthwhile.

**Have good-quality sleep.** Sleep helps your body repair tissues and keep your hormones balanced. The sleep hormone melatonin also helps to support your immune system and can help manage inflammation. Try to reduce the use of your phone and other devices for a couple of hours before bed, as the blue light from these devices can disturb the production of melatonin in your body. Keeping a regular sleep schedule will also help.

**Find stress-reducing activities.** Chronic stress can increase inflammation. It can also make pain, gut health and hormone imbalance worse – all of which play a role in endometriosis. Doing stress-reducing activities that you enjoy, such as yoga, mindful breathing, time in nature, and spending time with supportive people, can help to lower inflammation.

**Exercise.** Movement is a good way to ease pain. It helps to release hormones called 'endorphins' that lift your mood. Choose activities you are most comfortable doing and stay within your own limits. If you are unsure, please ask your GP before starting any new exercise regime.

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## Useful links

[www.endometriosis-uk.org](http://www.endometriosis-uk.org)

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/irritable-bowel-syndrome)

<http://bladderhealthuk.org/bladder-health-uk>

## Contact us

Endometriosis team

Email: [EndometriosisPAH@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:EndometriosisPAH@uhs.nhs.uk)

We would like to thank the Endometriosis Team at Worcestershire Acute Hospitals UHS Trust for allowing us to adapt this information for use in our service.

If you are a patient at one of our hospitals and need this document translated, or in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email **PFSH@uhs.nhs.uk**

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