

# FACT SHEET

## ENDOMETRIOSIS, DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

17 November 2021



### ENDOMETRIOSIS AT A GLANCE

Endometriosis is a condition where tissue similar to the endometrium (the lining of the uterus) grows elsewhere in the body. This tissue responds to reproductive hormones where oestrogen stimulates patches forming superficial, lesions or endometrioma (ovarian cysts). Inflammation is generally present, and adhesions (scar tissue) can also form in response. Endometriosis within the muscle tissue of the uterus is known as adenomyosis, typically characterised by an enlarged uterus and heavy menstrual flow as well as pain at time of period.

Living with endometriosis, its symptoms and lifelong impacts can affect your mental wellbeing and emotional health. Alongside the diagnostic journey and getting to grips with lifelong impacts and treatments, often runs an emotional rollercoaster ranging from uncertainty through relief and depression, anxiety, loss, and grief.

Research has found that chronic pain can have significant impacts on quality of life, and the resulting impact on mood can also amplify pain, creating a 'pain cycle'.

### THE LINK BETWEEN ENDOMETRIOSIS AND MOOD

There are a number of known links between endometriosis and mood:

- Living with chronic pain and its lifelong impacts
- The long journey to diagnosis (typically 7-10 years)
- Stress and uncertainty, anger, irritability, frustration
- Hormone fluctuations
- Other symptoms such as fatigue
- A lack of information

The length of your diagnosis journey can contribute to how you feel. You may experience feelings of shock, disbelief, anger, frustration, sadness, numbness, fear, anxiety, acceptance, and determination. You may feel empowered and relief with a diagnosis, but your experience and circumstances may also mean you experience depressions and/or anxiety.

## DEPRESSION

If you've constantly been feeling down, feeling hopeless or have little interest or pleasure in doing things you used to do you could have depression. Other possible signs and symptoms of depression include:

- irritability or restlessness
- feeling tired all the time, or a general loss of energy
- feeling empty, lonely
- sleeping problems - too much, or too little
- losing or gaining weight
- feeling bad about yourself or things you have done
- problems with concentration
- reduced sex drive
- thinking about death a lot
- thoughts of harming yourself.

Some people with endometriosis get depression, this can be for many reasons including the diagnosis journey, changes to lifestyle, dealing with chronic pain and other symptoms, hormonal treatments which can affect mood and emotional wellbeing, unsuccessful treatments and recurrences that need ongoing treatments, dealing with fertility problems, the lack of support or understanding as well as the financial implications, such as treatment costs or taking time off of work for surgery or due to symptoms.

## ANXIETY

If, over the last two weeks, you've been constantly worried, afraid or panicking about things that might happen or for no reason at all – you may be experiencing anxiety.

Feelings of anxiety are quite intense and can last for weeks, months or can keep going up and down over many years. Anxiety negatively affects your thoughts, behaviours and general health and can leave you feeling distressed and not enjoying life.

Some common anxiety symptoms include:

- hot and cold flushes
- shaking
- racing heart
- tight feeling in the chest or chest pains
- struggling to breathe
- snowballing worries that get bigger and bigger
- a racing mind full of thoughts
- a constant need to check things are right or clean
- persistent worrying ideas that seem 'silly or crazy'

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## COPING WITH DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Knowing when to ask for help is important. Even when it seems you can't control your feelings, you can control what you do about things. Just taking a small first step is enough to get you on the path to enjoying life again. And it'll work so much better if you don't try to go it alone.

### START BY TALKING TO SOMEONE

A good way to start dealing with what's going on is to share how you're feeling with someone you trust, or someone who understand what you are experiencing. This could be someone in your family, your partner, a friend or anyone in your community who you feel close to.

When you are dealing with stressful situations don't try to cope on your own, turn to family and friends to provide emotional support. They may also give you advice and share information, as well as provide practical support.

Endometriosis support groups can also give you the chance to talk to others who are experiencing the same ups and downs as you. Insight Endometriosis has endo meet-ups throughout New Zealand but if there isn't a group in your area, we do have online meet-ups. We can also recruit volunteers to facilitate a group in your area.

### THINGS YOU CAN DO YOURSELF

There are many self-help strategies that you can implement yourself to help cope with depression and anxiety. You are the expert in your own mental health and wellbeing. You can take charge of your recovery and do things that make you feel better, stronger and more in control.

When you have depression, it can be hard to find the energy or motivation to look after yourself. Start small and slowly build up to bigger things and try to notice what makes you feel better. Make a list of things that feel good and keep it on your phone, your diary or on the fridge. When you're struggling, check you list and pick one things you can do right now that might help.

Here are some ideas for you:

- learn about depression and your own early warning sign or triggers by keeping a mood diary
- identify and reduce stressful activities
- look after your body with physical activity, good food and sleep. Avoid or cut down the use of alcohol
- use relaxation exercises, yoga, meditation or massage
- spend time in nature, even just sitting in the sunshine for a few minutes can help
- practise mindfulness
- write down a daily routine and follow it, this could include drinking a glass of water when you wake up, making your bed, showering and getting dressed
- use positive affirmations

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- make a list of your favourite songs to listen to or funny movies and TV shows you enjoy watching
- journal
- connect with people; it's a natural response when feeling low and anxious to withdraw from people but actually strong connections can help you get well faster and stay well for longer

## PEOPLE WHO CAN HELP YOU

If it all seems overwhelming, don't forget you don't need to face these issues alone. If you need support, there are people trained to help with depression and anxiety, as well as those with lived experience who understand what you are going through. Reach out for help through a helpline or locate support through community organisations.

For more information about the helplines available, types of health professionals and how to find them visit: <https://depression.org.nz/get-better/who-else-can-help/>

## TREATMENTS

It might be recommended that you try medication or therapy to help deal with your symptoms. There are many different types of treatment and knowing more about them will help you choose the right one. Visit <https://depression.org.nz/get-better/treatments/> for more information about medications and treatments

For further information:

- Insight Endometriosis: Effective Communication Information Sheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Advocating for Yourself Information Sheet

References:

- Anxiety and depression in patients with endometriosis: impact and management challenges: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5440042/>
- Examining subjective wellbeing and health-related quality of life in women with endometriosis: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29095116/>
- Mental Health Foundation: [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)
- Te Hiringa Hauora: [www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)

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