

FACT SHEET

EXERCISING WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS

12 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.

Exercise can help with endometriosis symptoms as well as overall health and wellbeing. It's important to find what works best for you and your endometriosis, particularly if you find some types of exercise cause painful flares of symptoms.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

As well as benefits to overall health and wellbeing, exercise can help with endometriosis:

- Pain relief - exercise is a common treatment for management of chronic pain, through increased mobility, reduced inflammation, and release of feel-good chemicals called endorphins that can reduce pain sensations.
- Reducing uterine cramping – by balancing production of the prostaglandins which may be the cause of uterine cramping
- Improves mood – there is good evidence that 30 minutes daily exercise can be effective at improving mood as well as the ability to deal with stress
- Improve memory and thinking skills, and reduce 'brain fog' – particularly with aerobic exercise
- Other physical benefits – such as managing constipation and improving bowel health, reduced cholesterol, improved cardio-vascular health, reduced blood-pressure, reduced fatigue and improved sleep.
- Help you cope in a healthy way, gain confidence and perhaps get more social interaction.

HOW MUCH EXERCISE?

The Ministry of Health recommends exercising for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. It is important that your activity stretches you a little and makes you breathe harder and faster. It should not be painful or cause your symptoms to flare.

Small amounts of activity throughout the day is better than no activity, so don't be fooled into thinking that anything under 30-60 minutes isn't worthwhile. You might want to consider 'snackercise' such as breaking the 30 minutes into three lots of 10 minutes or two lots of 15 minutes. Any physical movement is beneficial.

SUPPORT TO EXERCISE: GREEN PRESCRIPTIONS

If you need help to get more active and make healthy food choices, speak to your doctor or practice nurse about a Green Prescription - a support service that helps you to improve your health and feel better at the same time.

Once you receive your Green Prescription, a trained support person will get in touch to help you get started with a physical activity programme that's right for you, and talk with you about improving your nutrition.

You'll get help with planning regular physical activity to help you stay active. There may also be the opportunity to meet and join other people in your community who are choosing to be more active just like you.

EXERCISING WITH ENDOMETRIOSIS

You may find it useful to adjust your exercise intensity and duration throughout your cycle. How you exercise on a good day and during a pain flare-up is going to vary so listen to your body and be flexible. On good days you could work on building fitness and strength, while on bad days choose activities which are calmer and of lower intensity.

Try low impact aerobics, stretches or relaxation exercises on bad days. Pilates, Yoga and Tai Chi are all great mind-body forms of exercise that can get you moving without straining yourself.

On good days build your strength & core with progressive Pilates movements, pelvic floor exercises or whole-body strength workouts.

Finding the relaxation exercises and strength and core exercises that you enjoy and works best for your body may be a process of trial and error. Don't give up on finding the best physical activity for you.

EXERCISE TO AVOID

There are no hard and fast rules when it comes to this because the severity of the condition and its symptoms vary widely from person to person. But, in general try to avoid or limit:

- High intensity workouts which through an interplay with hormones may further aggravate pain symptoms
- High impact exercises which may trigger pain through adhesions (scar tissue).
- Abdominal exercises, particularly when already experiencing pain. Working first on relaxing and gently stretching muscles first might be useful.

GETTING STARTED

Below are some tips to get you started with exercise and physical activity:

- Schedule exercise into your day, maybe wake up a little earlier and start your day with some physical activity or try going for a walk during a lunch break
- Equip yourself with comfortable clothes that you can move freely in, a good pair of trainers so your body is well supported and a water bottle to stay hydrated
- Finding others to exercise with can help keep you motivated. You might find an exercise buddy, a community exercise class or consider joining a local club.
- Choose what works for you and what you enjoy. If you're not sure, try different exercise and physical activity options - such as yoga, Pilates, dance, Zumba, swimming, water aerobics, brisk walking, cycling, tai-chi, judo, taekwondo. And don't forget gardening and other hobbies can also be great exercise as well as being rewarding in other ways.
- Keep at it! There may be times that you lose focus or fall out of the habit but come back to exercise and make it a priority to include some exercise and physical activity in your week
- Set yourself goals and reward yourself. Goals are good focus points and celebration points: set yourself short-term and long-term goals that are realistic and keep track of your achievements. Reward yourself with something that makes you feel good like buying a magazine, book, or scarf, get a manicure, go to the movies or art exhibition or simply allow yourself to spend an afternoon, or day, entirely devoted to something that you enjoy

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

- **“I'm not well”**
While endometriosis flare-ups can make it challenging to exercise, remember the benefits such as pain relief and improvements in mood. On bad days, yoga and a light walk (perhaps in nature) might be beneficial. Any physical activity can be useful on these days.
- **“I don't have time”**
It's important to prioritise your health, so schedule activity into your daily routine – perhaps by getting up earlier or fitting a walk into your lunch break. Aim for 'snackercise' - if you can't find half an hour try for three 10 minute sessions, use the stairs instead of the lift, park your 10 minutes' walk away from your destination. And remember all activities count - it doesn't have to be a workout at a gym; gardening and other activities around the home are an important part of your activity routine too.
- **“I'm too tired”**
Remember physical activity actually helps to improve your energy levels and sleep better. Start small and slowly build up as your energy levels increase
- **“I can't afford it”**
You don't have to join a gym to exercise! There are lots of free and low-cost options, many of which can be built into daily life – walking, dancing, gardening, and community classes.

Further Resources:

<https://www.verywellmind.com/exercise-and-improving-your-mood-2223781>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression-and-exercise/art-20046495>

Visit: www.insightendometriosis.org.nz

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