

INFORMATION SHEET

GP APPOINTMENTS

25 August 2021



Going to a doctor or gynaecologist appointment can be overwhelming and being as well-prepared as possible can relieve pressure and reduce feelings of anxiety.

If you are seeking an endometriosis diagnosis your GP can refer you to a gynaecologist specialising in endometriosis or you can refer yourself to a gynaecologist in private practice. Some medical (health) insurance policies may cover the fees associated with a gynaecologist appointment and treatments.

PREPARING FOR YOUR GP APPOINTMENT

Most GP appointments are only 10-15 minutes long and if you feel you may need longer with your GP you can always ask to book a double appointment.

Think about what you want to gain from the appointment, such as:

- a treatment plan to try for the next month,
- a change in treatment
- discuss new symptoms you are experiencing
- organise a referral to a gynaecologist, public outpatient clinic, pain clinic or other specialist

In preparation, write down all of your symptoms and questions, as well as the medications, supplements and other treatments you are currently utilising. Checking the symptoms and impacts listed in our Brochure or on our Symptom Jigsaws may help clarify your needs – you can take these along to your appointment to initiate a discussion.

Here are some questions you may want to ask your GP:

- What do you think is causing my symptoms?
- What treatment options are there? What do you recommend for me?
- How will these treatments help?
- How long do you think it will be before this treatment starts to make a difference?
- How long do you expect me to be on this treatment plan?
- What side effects can this treatment cause? Will it affect my plans to have children?
- What if the treatment is unsuccessful?
- Are there any lifestyle changes that might help?
- What do I do if my symptoms don't improve?
- What will happen if I do nothing?
- Will this affect my fertility? If so, how will we treat that?
- Could a previous surgery or another condition be causing my pain and period problems?
- What is the timeframe going forward for this treatment plan?
- When should I have a follow-up appointment?

Consider taking a support person with you to appointments – they can help with your self-advocacy, ensure all your questions are answered, and make notes. Make sure you share your questions and the outcomes you are looking for with your support person before the appointment – sometimes talking it over can really clarify what you want from the appointment.

DURING THE APPOINTMENT

Take a notebook or use your phone to take notes during your appointment.

State the purpose of your visit clearly and concisely. For example “I am here today because I have been having pelvic pain for two weeks every month. I’ve taken paracetamol but that doesn’t help much. I wonder if my symptoms could be due to endometriosis and if a referral to a gynaecologist is warranted?”

It’s important not to minimise your symptoms or be vague about them. Also be clear about the impacts your symptoms are having on your lifestyle including work, study, social life, mental health and relationships.

There is no need to be embarrassed about your symptoms. Using straight-forward language that makes your symptoms clear to your doctor will be welcomed. For example the description of ‘sharp, twisting pain in my lower pelvis for five days each month’ is much clearer than ‘monthly cramps’. Specific descriptions will help you to obtain a correct diagnosis and help.

If you have been using our Endometriosis Symptom Tracker, take this along to discuss your symptoms and provide your GP with as much accurate information as possible to get to a diagnosis and treatment plan.

It is important to include every single symptom, even if they don’t initially seem related to endometriosis. Your GP needs to know about everything you are experiencing.

Your GP will have questions for you, and these may include:

- What are your symptoms?
- When did they start?
- Do they happen or get worse at certain times?
- What makes them better or worse?
- Do any of your close female relatives suffer with period pain?
- When did you start menstruating?
- What is the date of your most recent period?
- How long do your periods last and what type of flow do you experience?
- What is your menstrual cycle (eg 25 – 30 days or irregular)?
- Do you bleed between periods or after sex?
- When was your last cervical smear test?

- What medications, birth control pills, or supplements do you take on a regular basis? Have these helped with symptoms? What side-effects have you experienced from these?
- Any previous illnesses (including sexually transmitted diseases) or operations?
- Do you smoke and / or drink alcohol, and how much and often?

If you are seeking a diagnosis of endometriosis, remember that a definitive diagnosis can only be made by surgical (laparoscopic) visualisation and biopsy of tissue suspected to be endometriosis. Under current NZ Guidelines, your GP would be expected to make a clinical (presumptive) diagnosis based on your symptoms, medical history and family history.

Your GP may suggest medicines and/or complementary therapies (see Insight Endometriosis Complementary Therapies Factsheet), as well as a referral to a gynaecologist for a more thorough assessment and further treatment.

Treatments suggested should be tailored to your needs and be offered on an informed consent basis (see Insight Endometriosis Code of Rights Factsheet and Advocating for Yourself Information Sheet)

An ultrasound and other tests (eg blood tests, colonoscopy) may also be suggested, to rule out other potential causes of your symptoms. In most parts of New Zealand there are long public waiting-lists for ultrasound – so if your priority is seeking a gynaecologist appointment, it is generally best to get that request underway, rather than further delaying this important appointment while waiting for an ultrasound.

IF YOUR GP DOESN'T LISTEN

Symptoms of endometriosis are wide-ranging and may be similar to several other conditions, which can make it difficult for a GP to reach a clinical diagnosis. Endometriosis has been likened to a 'jigsaw' of symptoms which a GP should be prepared to explore and piece together with you.

If instead your GP has been dismissive or minimised your carefully-stated symptoms and concerns, you may want to consider seeking a second opinion with a different GP.

AT THE END OF THE APPOINTMENT

By the end of the appointment you should have a management and treatment plan that you feel comfortable with, and ideally referrals for other tests that are warranted, and to a gynaecologist if that is something you want.

Remember to also ask your GP when you should return for a follow-up appointment.

For further information:

- Insight Endometriosis: Endo 101 Factsheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Endometriosis Symptoms Factsheet and Jigsaws
- Insight Endometriosis: Endometriosis Symptoms and Pain Tracker
- Insight Endometriosis: Diagnosing Endometriosis Factsheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Code of Rights Factsheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Advocating for Yourself Information Sheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Effective Communication Information Sheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Gynaecologist Appointment Information Sheet
- Insight Endometriosis: our suite of Fact Sheets on Treatment and Management, Lifestyle and Holistic

Visit: www.insightendometriosis.org.nz

Email: info@insightendometriosis.org.nz

Call: 07 855 5123



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