

ENDOMETRIOSIS^{UK}

DIET AND COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES FOR ENDOMETRIOSIS



COMPLEMENTARY THERAPIES FOR ENDOMETRIOSIS

A quick Google about complementary therapies for endometriosis can send you down a rabbit hole of false claims and misinformation, so we've gathered the latest evidence and put it all in one place. This way, you can make an informed decision about what may be worth trying for symptom relief and what not to waste your time and money on.

It should be noted that there is no cure for endometriosis and anything or anyone that claims to do so is making false claims.

If you want to try one or more of the therapies below, you should consult your GP or specialist as some treatments or supplements can interfere with standard medical treatment or blood tests.

**HELPING
YOU MAKE
AN INFORMED
DECISION ON
WHAT MAY HELP
SYMPTOMS**



DIET AND NUTRITION

You may have read that certain diets can help to manage endometriosis symptoms. There is little high-quality evidence for this but there is a growing understanding of the role of nutrition for symptom relief. Research is ongoing, and many people report that making changes to their diet helps to relieve symptoms.

For example, some people find that certain foods cause bloating or constipation and this can make their pain worse, particularly if they experience bowel symptoms from their endometriosis. It is important to note that what works for one person may not work for another.

Our webinar can help you to understand more about the role of nutrition: endometriosis-uk.org/webinar/endometriosis-and-nutrition

THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

What is it?

The Mediterranean diet is high in fruit, vegetables, beans, legumes such as chickpeas, wholegrains, nuts, seeds and olive oil with some fish and poultry. It limits red meat, sugar and alcohol as well as processed foods like ready meals, crisps, cakes, biscuits, bacon and breakfast cereals.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

This is a nutrient-rich diet that limits ultra-processed foods. It's recommended for us all so there is no harm at all in seeing if it makes a difference to endometriosis symptoms. Endometriosis is an inflammatory condition, so it's thought that the anti-inflammatory effects of the Mediterranean diet may help reduce pain and symptom severity.

CUTTING OUT GLUTEN

What is it?

Gluten is a name for the proteins found in wheat, rye and barley.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

There is no evidence for cutting out gluten completely unless you have coeliac disease, but some people do report benefits. If you wish to try cutting it out, you should do so under the supervision of a dietitian as it can have knock-on effects, such as putting you at risk of low fibre intake. Some evidence suggests that eating lots of gluten (foods like bread, cakes, biscuits), red meat, alcohol and caffeine might affect the production of oestrogen, the female sex hormone which can stimulate endometriosis. Reducing the amount of these foods in your diet could potentially help with symptoms. However, more research is needed to establish if this is the case.

BOOSTING THE GUT MICROBIOME

What is it?

The gut microbiome is the community of trillions of bacteria that live in your gut. It can be changed through the foods we eat and taking probiotic/prebiotic supplements, although there are many other factors that affect it.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

Research has shown that the microbiome is altered in those with endometriosis and further research aims to look at whether it can be targeted for treatment and whether endometriosis causes the imbalance or the other way around.

It is a promising area of research for endometriosis because having a healthy gut microbiome is linked to reduced inflammation. Eating a diverse, nutritious, whole-food diet supports a healthy gut microbiome. You could also try fermented foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi and kefir to introduce more friendly bacteria into your gut. These can all be found in supermarkets and health food shops.

Caution should be used with probiotic/prebiotic supplements as they vary in quality and it's not yet clear which types help with what conditions.



LOW-FODMAP DIET

What is it?

FODMAP stands for fermentable oligosaccharides, disaccharides, monosaccharides and polyols. These are known as short-chain carbohydrates and are poorly absorbed by the small intestine. Some people experience symptoms such as cramping and diarrhoea after eating them. The diet is a short-term intervention that involves three steps of cutting out high-FODMAP foods such as beans, lentils, onions and garlic. Then reintroducing them gradually and maintaining a diet that excludes any triggers.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

If you have IBS alongside endometriosis or gastrointestinal symptoms similar to IBS, the low FODMAP diet may offer some relief from symptoms. However, there is no evidence for this diet in relation to endometriosis specifically. If you try it for symptom relief or to see what you might be reacting to, it should be done under the guidance of a registered dietitian. Cutting out foods and then reintroducing them needs to be done carefully as excluding foods groups can result in greater sensitivity to them when you reintroduce them and also affect the balance of the microbiome.

THE AUTOIMMUNE PROTOCOL (AIP) DIET

What is it?

The AIP diet is an elimination diet that's designed to lower inflammation in people with autoimmune disorders such as Crohn's disease. Initially, you eliminate a large number of food groups and drinks such as dairy, grains, nightshade vegetables, eggs, coffee and alcohol. Then only eat permitted foods such as fruit, vegetables, meat, fermented foods and bone broth for a month or longer. You then slowly reintroduce some of the foods you've cut out to see what causes a reaction and then stay in a maintenance phase of avoiding foods that cause you a problem.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

There is no evidence that the AIP diet can help with endometriosis. Those who promote it online sometimes hail it as a cure but be reassured that this is not the 'cure you don't know about'. We do not recommend trying this diet. It may bring temporary symptom relief but it's very restrictive and hard to adhere to in the long-term.

EXERCISE OR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Can it help with endometriosis?

There is good evidence for using exercise/physical activity to manage pain but while there are promising small studies on exercise for endometriosis specifically, there is not yet any high-quality evidence.

According to a 2024 review, numerous studies have suggested positive effects for people with endometriosis who performed exercise exclusively or alongside with other therapies, showing improvements in pain levels, quality of life, anxiety and depression. However, it notes, the current lack of high-quality, robust studies is an obstacle to knowledge in this area. An interesting study is underway called the CRESCENDO program (inCREase physical Exercise and Sport to Combat ENDometriosis) so watch this space!

Exercise won't do you any harm and it can help to boost mood and resilience. It can feel hard to motivate yourself if you're in pain, so start with short, gentle activities such as swimming or walks. Exercise is also important as you age – especially during peri- and post-menopause – to help maintain muscle mass, regulate mood and maintain cardiovascular health. This also applies if you have been put into medically induced menopause or had a hysterectomy, either with or without oophorectomy.



PELVIC HEALTH PHYSIOTHERAPY

What is it?

A specialist branch of physiotherapy (physio) that helps to improve the function of the pelvic floor – a bowl-shaped group of muscles, ligaments, nerves and fascia – connective tissue that surrounds organs, blood vessels, bones, nerve fibres, and muscles.

Women and those assigned female at birth with endometriosis can experience symptoms such as:

- Overactive, shortened and tight pelvic-floor muscles
- Painful bladder and bowel movements
- Pain during/after sex

After a thorough assessment, pelvic health physiotherapists aim to treat symptoms through exercises, advice, and relaxation and breathing techniques. It can also involve manual therapy.

It's important to note that the treatment will not cause you more pain and it does not have to be internal.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

Yes. It's an evidence-based, proven treatment used in specialist endometriosis clinics. You can be referred by your GP or specialist, or see a private physiotherapist. Ensure that they are a specialist pelvic health physiotherapist with endometriosis experience and registered with the Pelvic, Obstetric and Gynaecological Physiotherapy Organisation: thepogp.co.uk

For more information, watch our webinar on pelvic health physiotherapy: endometriosis-uk.org/webinar/practical-pain-management-physiotherapy-and-endometriosis.

ACUPUNCTURE

What is it?

A treatment derived from Traditional Chinese Medicine in which fine needles are inserted into the body to stimulate it and left there during the treatment session. You may feel a slight sensation as the needle goes in but it's not a painful treatment.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

There is some evidence that it may help with endometriosis pain but the studies so far are small. For example, a 2023 review of six studies found that acupuncture treatment for endometriosis 'demonstrated clinically relevant improvements in pelvic pain and should be considered as a potential treatment intervention'.

A small 2023 trial on 106 women found that 'acupuncture is an effective and safe method of relieving dysmenorrhea [period pain], shortening the pain duration, and improving wellbeing and quality of life in women with endometriosis-associated pain. Although the benefits fade after treatment is discontinued'.

Larger, higher quality studies are needed to establish the benefits of acupuncture for endometriosis.

If you decide to try it, find a registered practitioner that specialises in pelvic acupuncture: acupuncture.org.uk/find-an-acupuncturist/

"A SMALL TRIAL OF 106 WOMEN FOUND THAT ACUPUNCTURE IS AN EFFECTIVE AND SAFE METHOD OF RELIEVING PERIOD PAIN"



YOGA

What is it?

A mind and body practice consisting of physical postures (asanas) and a focus on the breath (pranayama). There are many kinds of yoga, some more physically demanding than others. You don't have to be super-fit or flexible to try yoga. Look for a beginner's class or chair-based yoga where the postures are supported. Another option is Yoga nidra, a guided meditation lying on the floor that helps the nervous system to achieve deep rest.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

There is evidence that yoga helps to relieve period pain. For example, a 2023 review concluded that: 'studies demonstrated a significant relief in dysmenorrhea (period pain) among those who practiced yoga with improved pain tolerance and reduced stress levels'.

The evidence is limited for endometriosis specifically, but it's a growing area of interest. For example, a small study found that eight weeks of Hatha yoga practice twice a week was associated with a reduction in levels of chronic pelvic pain, and an improvement in quality of life in women with endometriosis. And a small 2023 pilot study on 42 women who did eight weeks of endometriosis yoga classes found benefits, with the authors concluding that, 'the practice of endometriosis yoga is recommended for women with endometriosis to reduce levels of pain and stress, and to improve quality of life'.

CHINESE HERBAL MEDICINE

What is it? Part of Traditional Chinese Medicine, practitioners dispense herbal preparations for a variety of ailments.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

Some small, low-quality studies have shown benefit for various aspects of endometriosis, but nothing that would warrant recommending it as a treatment, either alone or alongside standard treatment. However, some people report symptom relief. If you wish to try it, it's essential that you tell your GP or endometriosis prescriber what you're taking as it may dangerously interact with standard medications or treatments.

To find a registered practitioner visit: atcm.co.uk



**'THE PRACTICE OF
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COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

CBT is a type of talking therapy that aims to improve wellbeing and quality of life. For pain management, it considers that emotional factors such as stress, depression and anxiety can affect how we perceive physical pain and how we respond to it. It helps to address these by equipping you with coping strategies.

It also addresses negative thought patterns around pain by giving you ways to change/replace them over time. This is called cognitive restructuring.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

There is good evidence for chronic pain, but not specifically for endometriosis. A 2022 review of the evidence found that research in this area is promising but not yet high quality.

However, a 2024 review on CBT for adolescents states that, 'CBT is widely regarded as the leading non-pharmacological treatment for chronic pain [in adults], encompassing gynaecological conditions associated with chronic pelvic pain, such as endometriosis'.

Research is ongoing and will hopefully become higher quality. If you want to try CBT, find a registered practitioner at: [cbtregisteruk.com](https://www.cbtregisteruk.com)

"CBT IS WIDELY REGARDED AS THE LEADING NON-PHARMACEUTICAL TREATMENT FOR CHRONIC PAIN"



A 2024 STUDY ON ENDOMETRIOSIS-RELATED PAIN FOUND THAT A BRIEF MINDFULNESS-BASED INTERVENTION REDUCED SENSORY PAIN AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

MINDFULNESS

What is it?

Mindfulness is a relaxation technique in which you focus on being present in your body and surroundings, noticing your thoughts, how you feel and what you can see and hear. It can be used in different ways, such as meditation.

Can it help with endometriosis symptoms?

There is some low-quality evidence that mindfulness can help to manage pain from endometriosis. For example, a small 2022 pilot study found that a brief mindfulness-based intervention on women with deep endometriosis found that it significantly reduced pain unpleasantness, pelvic pain and pain, difficulty during bowel movements, and decreased all endometriosis-related pain at follow-up.

And a 2024 study on endometriosis-related pain found that a brief mindfulness-based intervention reduced sensory pain and psychological stress, and it was these in combination that improved women's vitality.

If you try a mindfulness-based practice, try to commit to it for at least a month to give it a chance to work. Research found that it took four weeks for meditation to become effective for endometriosis pain.



FURTHER SUPPORT AND INFORMATION

NURSE-LED SUPPORT LINE:
ENDOMETRIOSIS-UK.ORG/NURSE-SUPPORT

VOLUNTEER PEER SUPPORT HELPLINE:
0808 808 2227

ENDOMETRIOSIS-UK.ORG

REFERENCES

DIET

Gluten:
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10507348/>

Microbiome:
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6379373/>
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9729346/#:~:text=Bulent%20et%20al.,increased%20in%20patients%20with%20endometriosis>

FODMAP:
<https://www.monashfodmap.com/blog/endometriosis-and-ibs/>

No evidence for AIP and endo:
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10507348/>

EXERCISE

Exercise and pain: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5491894/#:~:text=Further%20regular%20exercise%20reduces%20serotonin,1>

<https://bmcwomenshealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12905-021-01500-4>

2024 review: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38916808/>

CRESCENDO: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38012776/>

ACUPUNCTURE

Small study on dysmenorrhoea:
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36716811/>

2023 review: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2213422023000823>

YOGA

Hatha yoga study: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27869485/>
Endo yoga pilot study: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35839113/>

CBT

Well evidenced for chronic pain: <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Fa0035747>

2022 review: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35576938/>

2024 review on adolescents: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1077722924000300>

MINDFULNESS

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ejp.1939>

Meditation and pain/stress reduction: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00737-023-01381-6>

Meditation - four weeks to become effective: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12671-024-02381-y?fromPaywallRec=true>





 Visit **www.endometriosis-uk.org**

 Helpline: **0808 808 2227**