# Endometriosis affects one in 10 women in the UK but diagnosis can take nearly nine years



A commonly overlooked condition affecting around one in 10 women in the UK may present with symptoms frequently mistaken for diet-related or minor digestive issues, according to medical experts highlighting the need for greater awareness and improved diagnosis. The disease in question, known as endometriosis, involves the growth of tissue resembling the lining of the womb in other areas of the body, such as the ovaries and fallopian tubes.

Dr Gareth Nye, a Biomedical Science lecturer at the University of Salford, spoke to the Mirror about the condition, revealing that approximately 10% of women aged between 15 and 49 are affected by endometriosis. He explained, "Endometriosis develops when cells that resemble the part of the womb which sheds during menstruation (endometrium) is found in locations outside of the womb. This can occur in a number of places, but in 60% of cases it's found in the ovaries, leading to fertility issues."

Symptoms of endometriosis are wide-ranging and often mistaken for other health concerns. These can include persistent lower abdominal or back pain, pain that worsens during menstruation, discomfort during sexual intercourse, diarrhoea, painful cramps, heavy menstrual bleeding, and fertility problems. The complexity of symptoms contributes to the challenge of diagnosis, with figures indicating that the average time to receive a diagnosis in England now stands at nearly nine years.

Dr Nye elaborated on why diagnosis can be so difficult: "Other uncommon sites include the bowel, kidneys and lungs, leading to irregular symptoms and a very difficult diagnosis. This tissue is found by the immune system, which thinks it's harmful to the body and acts to remove it, leading to inflammation and pain. To make matters worse, this tissue is still acting like the endometrial lining, and so, as the monthly hormonal cycles occur, you can see growth of the tissues and even bleeding, which therefore makes symptoms inconsistent and variable from month to month, even week to week."

Globally, the World Health Organisation estimates that about 190 million people are affected by endometriosis, though Dr Nye suspects that this figure is likely an underestimate due to underdiagnosis and a lack of awareness. Another barrier to timely diagnosis is the stigma surrounding the discussion of menstrual health issues. A focus group study conducted by Endometriosis UK found that nearly half of women aged 16 to 54 would feel concerned about informing their employer if they needed sick leave related to endometriosis.

Emma Cox, CEO of Endometriosis UK, has highlighted societal misconceptions that contribute to delayed diagnosis. She stated, "Myths such as 'chronic period pain is normal' or 'you must have a low pain threshold' manifesting in society, workplaces, schools, and even healthcare settings contribute to those experiencing symptoms being put off from seeking medical advice and contribute to diagnosis taking on average a shocking eight years." Cox further emphasised the wide-ranging impact of delayed diagnosis, noting, "The impact of delayed diagnosis on people's physical and mental health can't be overstated. If undiagnosed, the disease may progress, and negatively impact people's careers, education, relationships and all aspects of their life."

Currently, endometriosis has no cure. Treatments are focused on symptom management and can include pain relief medication and surgical options such as hysterectomies. There is an ongoing movement to educate healthcare professionals about women's reproductive health issues to improve the accessibility and efficiency of diagnosis. Dr Nye encouraged women to voice their symptoms and seek support, saying, "Women need to remain vocal about their journey to diagnosis and their unique symptoms to ensure the NHS gains a full insight into the issues at hand. Getting in contact with charities such as Endometriosis UK can provide backing and support, but ultimately, wholescale changes in medical opinion on women's health issues need to change before we can begin to help, in addition to more funding and research into the conditions."

The NHS provides a list of potential symptoms associated with endometriosis that women experiencing persistent or severe symptoms may consult with healthcare professionals about. This move forms part of efforts to improve recognition and understanding of the condition.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Endometriosis%20UK%20diagnosis%20survey%202023%20report%20March.pdf> - This report from Endometriosis UK supports the claim that endometriosis affects approximately 10% of women and highlights the challenges faced during diagnosis, including societal stigma and misconceptions. It also emphasizes the difficulty in discussing menstrual health issues in various settings.
2. <https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2024/12/10/a-better-understanding-of-endometriosis-in-england/> - This article provides data on the prevalence of endometriosis in England, linking census data with hospital records to estimate prevalence. It contributes to understanding the scale and impact of endometriosis across the region.
3. <https://www.cprd.com/approved-studies/incidence-and-prevalence-endometriosis-england-between-2010-and-2020> - This study focuses on the incidence and prevalence of endometriosis in England from 2010 to 2020 using healthcare data. It supports the claim that about one in ten people with periods will have endometriosis, highlighting its prevalence and the need for improved diagnosis.
4. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28954555/> - This study provides insights into the incidence of endometriosis, supporting the idea that it is a significant health issue affecting a notable portion of the female population. The data helps in understanding the scope of endometriosis cases in the UK.
5. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/bulletins/characteristicsofwomenwithanendometriosisdiagnosisinengland/27march11to31december21> - This bulletin from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) discusses characteristics of women diagnosed with endometriosis in England, providing demographic insights that can help in understanding the condition's impact.
6. <https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/> - Endometriosis UK is a charity that offers support and raises awareness about endometriosis. The organization's resources and surveys highlight the importance of addressing societal misconceptions and improving healthcare responses to endometriosis.
7. <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/health/overlooked-symptoms-could-sign-often-10126587> - Please view link - unable to able to access data