

3. If you think you have an overgrowth of the yeast, *Candida albicans*, in your digestive tract and suffer abdominal bloating after meals, then remove the foods which are 'feeding' the yeast – refined sugars, yeasts, wheat, fermented foods, dried fruits, dairy foods – for two to three months. Eat all the alternative foods listed above.
4. Avoid eating excess animal fats to avoid dioxins. Cut down on the red meat and dairy foods you eat. If you are vegetarian, take your protein supply more from pulse vegetables (peas, beans and lentils), also nuts and seeds, than from dairy foods. Researchers F Parazinni et al from the University of Milan found that a higher intake of red meat and ham may increase the risk for endometriosis, while a higher intake of fresh (green) vegetables and fruit may decrease the risk for endometriosis. Other foods including fish, milk, cheese, liver, carrots, wholegrain foods, coffee or alcohol did not seem to significantly affect the risk for endometriosis in this study. The results are based on the data from two studies conducted in Italy between 1984 and 1999 which compared the eating habits of 504 women with confirmed endometriosis to 504 women without endometriosis but who were hospitalised with other diagnoses (excluding gastrointestinal disorders). "Selected food intake and risk of endometriosis" *Human Reproduction* 19 (2004) pp 1775-1759.
5. Eat more nuts and seeds for their zinc, calcium and fibre and essential oils, which are anti-inflammatory and help reduce pain. (Almonds, walnuts, pecans, cashews, pistachios, hazelnuts, sunflower, pumpkin and linseeds).
6. Exclude a food from your diet for one month if you feel it may be upsetting you. Stop eating all foods containing wheat, modified starch, gluten and dextrins. At the end of the month, eat a little wheat and see if it has any side effects when re-introduced, e.g: diarrhoea or constipation, fatigue. The same can be done for dairy foods, coffee, tea, chocolate, sugar or citrus fruits, etc.
7. Eat organic, fresh and high quality foods whenever possible or be aware and obtain your food from a reliable source.
8. Reduce your pollution exposure, peel root vegetables, and wash fruits and salad vegetables.
9. Buy only cold-pressed vegetable oils for salad dressings and shallow fry using a little olive oil and butter. Use butter sparingly as your spread. (Salad dressing – 2tsp olive oil, 2tsp walnut oil, 2tsp lemon juice and herbs, spices or mustards).
10. Remove chemicals from your home environment.

Supplements – are they necessary?

Supplements of vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids taken for three to six months will help support ailing body systems. When the body is ill it needs building materials to restore its vitality. By taking supplements you can support the immune and reproductive systems and improve the body's healing potential. Take a course of supplements for three months: (Quest or Solgar)

- a. Multi-vitamin/mineral (yeast, wheat, gluten and sugar free)
- b. Vitamin C (1,000mgs per day)
- c. Evening primrose oil and fish oils
- d. *Acidophilus*
- e. Magnesium malate
- f. Slippery elm (wheat-free)
- g. Digestive enzyme with each meal

Diet is now thought to be a very important factor in the development of some diseases. Very low intakes of certain vitamins and minerals may be having an effect on the liver's ability to degrade oestrogen to a form where it can be excreted by the body. When oestrogen continues to circulate it may cause cell proliferation, as in endometriosis.

What we choose to eat is very important as nutrients literally keep the cells healthy, so that enzymes and hormones can be produced in the right quantities at the right times. The only thing you put into your body on a regular day-to-day basis to keep you well is food and drink. Therefore the quality of the foods that you eat is very important in strengthening the reproductive, immune and digestive systems.

A good way of finding out your eating habits is to write down everything that you put into your mouth for a three or four day period. That way you can see immediately how you can make changes to your nutrient intake.

Over-run with oestrogens

Control of oestrogen is a nutritional process. It is disturbed by too much sugar, too little protein and is incapacitated almost completely by the lack of vitamin B complex and proteins. In order to detoxify the liver, the body requires a constant supply of B vitamins, B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, choline and inositol in order to create the enzymes needed. Vegetables make a major contribution to B vitamin intake and also the intake of magnesium and fibre. Vitamin B6, zinc and magnesium encourage production of progesterone to help balance the two main sex hormones.

Infertility

Women with problems of fertility have a better chance of success if their bodies are healthy, as nutrients support the reproductive system. Nutrient intake is vital not only to health but the future of a baby.

The Hackney Hospital study showed that women with healthy weight babies were eating three regular meals per day. These included nutrient-rich foods such as wholegrain breakfast cereals, muesli, oats, nuts, seeds, eggs, wholemeal bread, dairy produce, fresh fruits and vegetables.

Nutritional research shows that high copper and low zinc, magnesium and manganese are common in couples with fertility problems when biochemical tests are undertaken. High copper and low zinc alters the secretions of the Fallopian tubes and it is felt that this may cause vulnerability to infections and adhesions. Vitamins C, E and zinc help to heal scar tissue. Hair mineral analysis tests indicate that high magnesium and low potassium readings can be a result of allergies. Low zinc may be due to use of the contraceptive pill or a copper IUD, high copper levels in drinking water or lead contamination (some research links high copper levels with ovarian cyst formation).

Nutrition may restore fertility if a healthy eating programme is undertaken. Cold pressed oils and proteins are essential for production of the hormones which drive the reproductive system. Choice of good oils is vital to fertility, and 3oz (75gm) of proteins should be eaten each day.

Women who had low birth weight sickly babies were eating a diet that included refined flours and sugars and manufactured rather than fresh food. It is very important to eliminate from the diet any food which causes allergic reactions. These foods can make the immune system overactive such that it may attack sperm.

Painful prostaglandins

Pain is an important alarm signal, the 'guardian of health'. It tells us when all is not well with our reproductive system. Certain nutrients possess analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties, which correspond to those of orthodox medicines without the side effects.

Essential fatty acids such as fish oils, evening primrose, starflower, borage, linseed oils, nut and seed oils metabolise within the body to form anti-inflammatory prostaglandins which help reduce pain and inflammation. These good quality unhydrogenated, cold-pressed oils are beneficial to people with inflammatory conditions. Endometriosis certainly has an element of inflammation around the sites of the endometrial deposits. The use of oils from fish and vegetables produces a prostaglandin PGE1 which reduces inflammation. Animal fats, from meat and dairy foods, metabolise in the body to form prostaglandins that may trigger pain and inflammation. Therefore a balance should be struck between a low intake of animal fats against a high intake of vegetable and fish oils.

Vitamin C is also effective at reducing inflammation. B complex vitamins, B1, B6 and B12 have been seen to have anti-inflammatory effects as well as an analgesic action, so stopping inflammation and reducing pain at the same time.

Magnesium deficiency is associated with muscle cramping in the abdomen and joint pains. Magnesium acts on nerves to relax muscles and may help to reduce cramping pains at period time.

Phenylalanine (DLPA) is an amino acid, which can give marked reduction of pain in some people. When pain strikes, our bodies produce endorphins. These are the body's natural painkillers, mimicking powerful analgesics. DLPA works by strengthening the body's supply of endorphins, reducing pain in a natural way. It must be taken continuously until the pain stops and then the dose can be reduced daily until the correct maintenance dose is reached. DLPA works in a significant number of people who try it. It may be available on prescription. See our DLPA leaflet for further details.

Avoiding excess

Some researchers feel that the oestrogenic effect of some foods may be causing girls to mature sexually around three years earlier than previous generations. Certainly studies show that periods become heavier and more painful when animal fat consumption rises. Studies also show that vegetarian girls have periods beginning at later ages, they have lighter, shorter, easier periods because they have less oestrogen in the body. Ensure your daughters do not eat an excess of meat and dairy foods.

Many canned and foods in plastic wrappers may contain nonylphenols or bisphenol A, which are oestrogen mimics and are known to disrupt the reproductive system.

Deadly dioxins

Research by the American Endometriosis Association has implicated levels of the pesticides, dioxins and PCBs, with the development of endometriosis. Dioxins build up in fat cells in the body which may cause damage to the immune system. Pesticides interfere with the metabolism of choline, a B vitamin that is vital for correct liver function and for the degradation of oestrogen.

Food is the largest source of dioxins for the average individual. It tends to be absorbed by animal fats. Advice on reducing dietary intake of dioxins suggests cutting down on animal fat in the diet such as full cream milk, butter, cheeses and meats. Fish should be from unpolluted areas. Processed foods containing hidden fats should be avoided. Plant foods may be contaminated by fall-out from the air so outer leaves should be discarded and all root vegetables should be peeled. It is important not to change the diet suddenly as this can release dioxins from fat stored in the body organs such as the liver.

Phytoestrogens

Some research suggests that certain oestrogen-like ingredients in plant foods can protect against cancer of the breast and reproductive system. (It is felt that these are good forms of oestrogen). These are the foods containing isoflavonoids in products such as tofu, tempeh and miso, and foods high in lignans such as rye breads.

Compounds found in foods such as celery, alfalfa, liquorice, rhubarb, anise, bean sprouts, sunflower seeds, red clover, soya and citrus fruits have a similar effect in the body to oestrogens. Soya contains isoflavones, proteins that are weak oestrogens which may counter the effect of natural body oestrogens. Eating certain foods such as broccoli, French beans, pomegranates and fish oils encourages more of these beneficial oestrogens to be produced.

Eat moderate amounts only, as an excess may be detrimental in women of reproductive age. Legumes and soy in excess are known to reduce fertility. So, eat them as part of a balanced diet, never to excess.

Food Intolerances

Wheat and dairy foods are the two main food intolerances. One may be affecting you. The test is to exclude that food for one month. Eat a variety of wholegrain cereals, nuts and seeds, pulse vegetables (peas, beans and lentils). Wholegrain cereals are very nutritious and it is important to vary them. Most British food seems to be based on wheat and it is easy to eat an excess daily. Gluten grains are wheat, rye, oats, barley, triticale and spelt. Some people with excessive bloating may be sensitive to high gluten levels and are best avoiding genetically modified wheat. Grains that are gluten-free are rice, corn (maize), buckwheat, millet, quinoa, tapioca, arrowroot, sago and can be eaten in order to give variety to the diet. If you suffer from constipation, bloating and abdominal pain, exclude wheat from your diet for one month to see if pain is reduced.

Alternatives to wheat include rye or corn crispbreads, 100% rye bread, quinoa breads, rice and corn bread, rye pasta, oatcakes, porridge oats, corn tortilla and taco's, corn pasta, rice pasta, buckwheat pancakes, rice cakes, brown rice, millet, millet flakes, popcorn, pastry made from brown rice flour and ground almonds and margarine in equal proportions, potato based pizza and poppadoms.

Endometriosis – what you can do – Practical solutions

1. Daily, eat two pieces of fresh fruit, a salad or crudités, three vegetables (two should be a green leafy variety rich in B vitamins, vitamin C, magnesium, calcium, iron and fibre) and one should be a red-orange vegetable (rich in vitamin A/beta carotene and vitamin C). Eat more green leafy vegetables, they support ovary function.
2. Avoid an excess of foods that stimulate the body – caffeine, coffee, chocolate, tea, alcohol, refined sugars and flours. Chocolate is meant to be a treat for birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas and Easter, so save your treat! Eat fruit and nut bars instead, they are packed with nutrients, not sugar and fat, and they will do you far more good. Trophy and Village bakery bars are sugar free.