

## A Gut-Wrenching Diagnosis

Focus on endometriosis

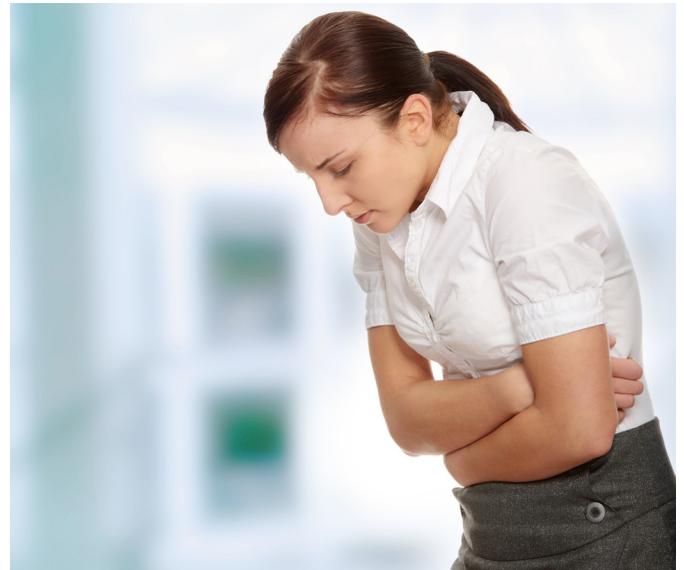
**Endometriosis** is a painful, chronic disease affecting millions of women worldwide, in which tissue that normally lines the interior of the uterus grows outside of it. The most common symptoms are acute pelvic pain, often associated with menstruation, and infertility. The disease most often affects women in their 30s and 40s.

Women with endometriosis typically describe menstrual pain that's far worse than usual and has increased over time, while other symptoms can include:

- pain during sex
- menstruation lasting longer than seven days
- nausea or vomiting
- bowel and urinary disorders

Diagnosis of endometriosis is usually based on the identification of symptoms and subsequent medical imaging, but a biopsy is considered the most definitive method of diagnosis. Misdiagnosis, unfortunately, is all too easy because there are many other conditions that cause similar symptoms, including pelvic inflammatory disease, irritable bowel syndrome, interstitial cystitis, and fibromyalgia.

The severity of pelvic pain also can be misleading, because some women with mild endometriosis have extensive pain, while others with advanced endometriosis may have little pain or even no pain at all. There is no cure for the condition,



but a number of treatments including pain medication, hormonal treatments, or surgery, often can improve symptoms.

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