

DOLLY DOCTOR REPORT

ENDOMETRIOSIS

Period pain isn't always as innocent as it seems. Here's what you need to know about endometriosis.

Getting your period for the first time is one of the most emotional things you'll experience. There'll be tears, laughter and a small fear of the unknown – but what if you're struggling with it more than the rest of your squad. What if the pain is so unbearable that you just can't focus on anything else? Knowing and listening to your body is one of the most important things you will learn to do, and now is the perfect time to start.

have a think about what could be causing it. "Period pain is not normal if it stops you from going to school or work," says Jean Hailes gynaecologist Dr Elizabeth Farrell. "Endometriosis can run in families, so finding out if other members of the family have it or have had period-pain problems is a good idea."

So if painkillers just don't dull the pain and you literally can't get out of bed, make an appointment with your doctor.

BUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME THEN?

Well, if it's endometriosis, your doctor will refer you to a gynaecologist – but we're getting a bit ahead of ourselves. So you're fully informed when you go to the doctor's office, let's first chat about what it is.

"Endometriosis is a condition in which the lining cells (endometrium) of our uterus grow in other sites in our body instead of just in the uterus,"

explains Elizabeth. "When we have a period, we lose blood and cells, which flow back into our lower abdomen. But, in those with endometriosis, instead of disappearing, the cells hang around and stick to organs and tissues and start to grow. Since these cells undergo the same hormonal changes as the endometrium, they multiply, increase in size and bleed at the same time as a period, which is what causes the symptoms."

OK, back to how it's diagnosed. You'll undergo a fairly simple medical procedure called a laparoscopy. It's easy for you because all you have to do is have a good sleep while the gynaecologist puts a thin tube fitted with a light through a cut in your belly button to see if there's any endometrial tissue in your pelvis. Wow, that sounds way scarier than it actually is...

Look, nobody likes surgery – heck, it'd actually be weird if you did – but remember that, like many illnesses, the earlier endometriosis is detected, the less crazy it'll get.



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PHOTOGRAPHY ANDREW FINLAYSON/BAUER MEDIA

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WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, 'LESS CRAZY'?!

We just mean there are four stages of intensity.

- Stage one is considered minimal. It means there's only a small amount of tissue where it shouldn't be.
- Stage two refers to mild cases where there are more than a few bits of tissue as well as pieces between the uterus and the rectum.
- Stage three refers to moderate cases where the tissue is connected to the ovaries.
- Stage four is the most severe. It means there's lots of misplaced tissue and changes to the shape of the pelvic organs, and the bladder and bowel could also be affected.

There's absolutely no reason to be afraid. We're just telling you all of this so you can be aware of these issues. If anything sounds familiar, go have a chat to your doctor.

"Don't be afraid to speak up and seek help – you're certainly not alone; about 10 per cent of women have endometriosis," explains Elizabeth. "Many people say pain with your period is normal – don't believe them." **D**