



Patient education: Endometriosis (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is endometriosis?

Endometriosis is a condition that affects women. It can cause pain in the lower part of the belly and trouble getting pregnant.

In endometriosis, cells that are similar to the inner lining of the uterus grow outside of the uterus ([figure 1](#)). It is not known exactly how or why this happens. This tissue, which does not belong outside the uterus, can then break down, bleed, and cause symptoms.

What are the symptoms of endometriosis?

Some women with endometriosis have no symptoms. But most have pain in the lower part of the belly that can occur:

- Before or during monthly periods
- Between monthly periods
- During or after sex
- When urinating or having a bowel movement (often during monthly periods)

Other symptoms of endometriosis can include:

- Trouble getting pregnant
- Growths on the ovaries that a doctor can feel during an exam

All of these symptoms can also be caused by conditions that are not endometriosis. But if you have any of these symptoms, tell your doctor or nurse.

Is there a test for endometriosis?

No. But your doctor or nurse might suspect you have it by learning about your symptoms and doing an exam.

The only way to know for sure if you have endometriosis is for a doctor to do surgery and look for endometriosis tissue outside the uterus.

How is endometriosis treated?

Endometriosis can be treated in different ways. The right treatment for you will depend on your symptoms and on whether you want to be able to get pregnant in the future.

Doctors can use medicines to treat endometriosis. These include:

- Pain medicines – There are medicines that can treat the pain caused by endometriosis. But these medicines do not make the endometriosis go away.
- Birth control medicines – Certain birth control medicines can help reduce pain symptoms. This treatment is not appropriate for women who are trying to get pregnant.
- Medicines that stop monthly periods – These medicines stop the body from producing certain hormones. They can be helpful for women who do not improve with birth control medicines. For women who need to take them for longer than 6 months, doctors add treatment with other hormones.

Some women choose to have surgery to treat endometriosis. Different types of surgery can include:

- Laparoscopy – In this type of surgery, a doctor will make a small cut in the belly and put a tube with a camera inside the body. Then he or she can see and remove endometriosis tissue.
- Hysterectomy – If no other treatments work, doctors might suggest a hysterectomy. This is surgery to remove a woman's uterus. Sometimes, the doctor will also remove the ovaries and tubes that connect the ovaries to the uterus (fallopian tubes) ([figure 2](#)). A woman cannot get pregnant after her uterus is removed.

What if I am having trouble getting pregnant?

If you are having trouble getting pregnant, talk with your doctor or nurse. There are different medicines and treatments that can help a woman get pregnant.

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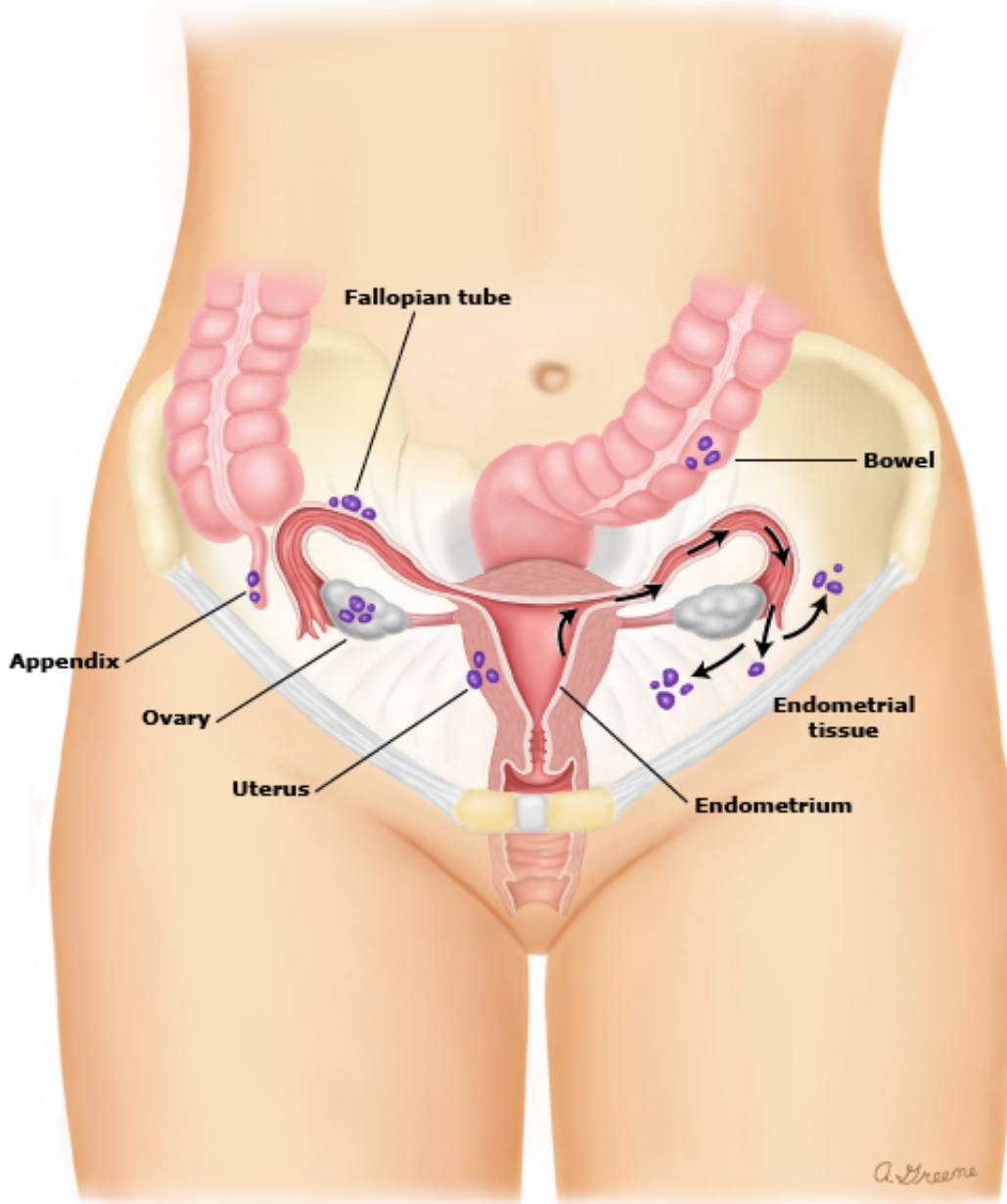
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GRAPHICS

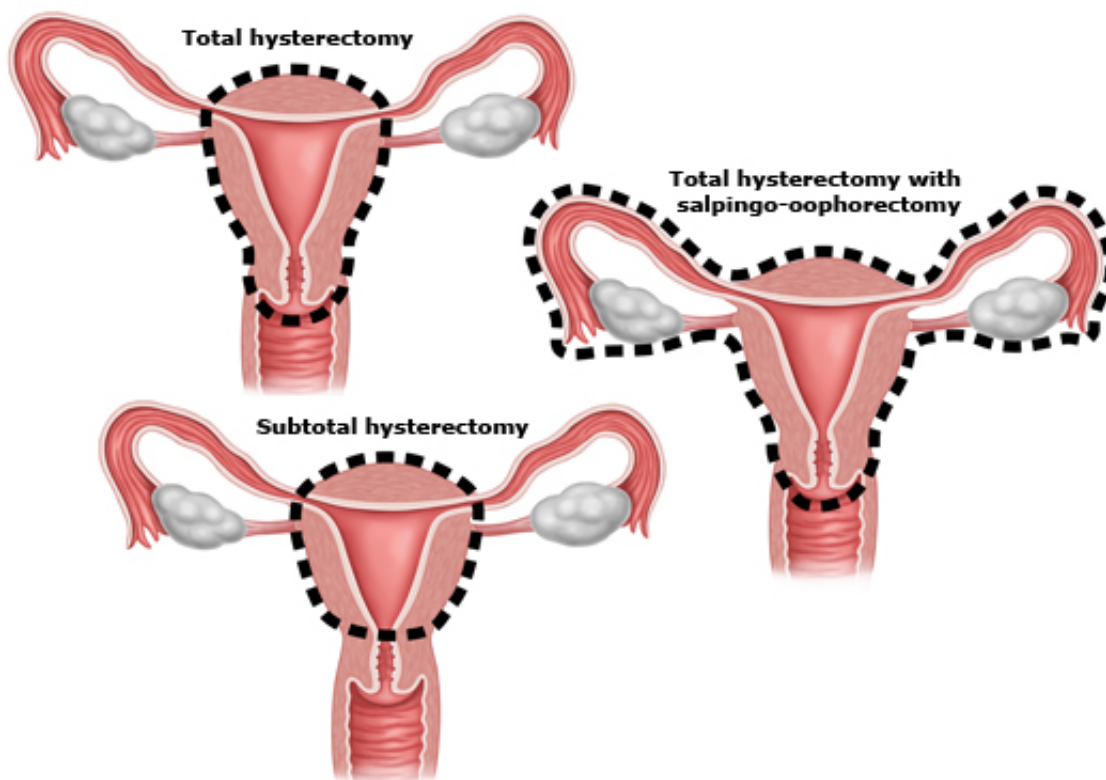
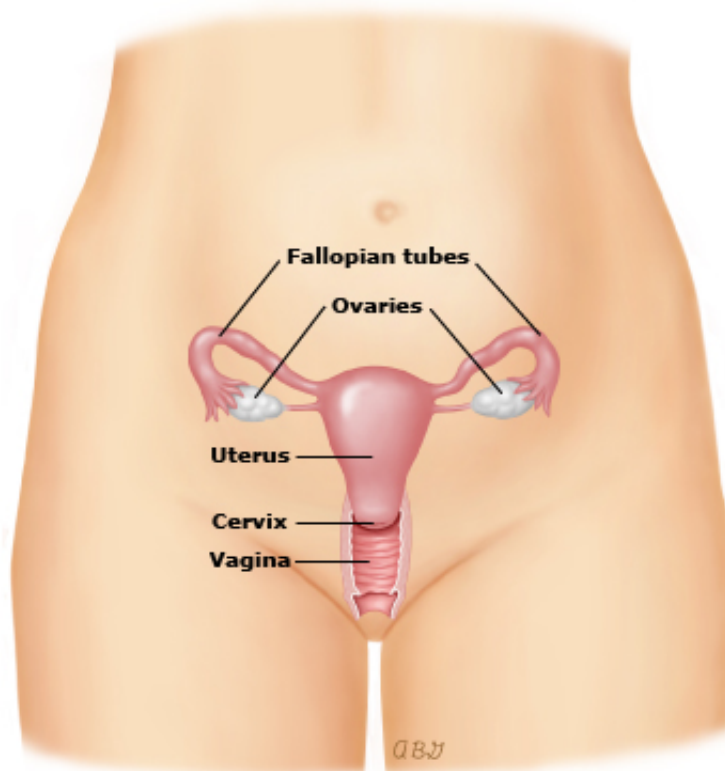
Areas where endometriosis can be found



This figure shows some of the areas in the body (purple spots) where endometriosis can be found. Common areas affected by endometriosis include the ovaries, the tubes connecting the ovaries to the uterus (fallopian tubes), and the bowel. Endometriosis can also grow in front, in back, and to the sides of the uterus. Sometimes the doctor can feel the tissue when doing a pelvic exam.

Graphic 78942 Version 5.0

Types of abdominal hysterectomy



In an abdominal hysterectomy, the doctor removes the uterus through an opening in the belly. If it is a "total hysterectomy," the doctor also removes the cervix. If it is a "subtotal" or "supracervical" hysterectomy, the doctor removes the uterus but leaves the cervix in place. To do this surgery, doctors sometimes make a horizontal cut (from left to right) at the bikini line. Sometimes they instead make a vertical cut from top to bottom. As part of a hysterectomy, doctors sometimes also remove the ovaries and the tubes that connect the

ovaries to the uterus (fallopian tubes). This is called "salpingo-oophorectomy."

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