

Women's wellness: Is endometriosis a risk factor for ovarian cancer?

27 December 2018, by From Mayo Clinic News Network



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Q: I just found out I have endometriosis, which my mother also has. She says endometriosis raises our risk of ovarian cancer, so I should have children early and then get a hysterectomy. What's the real story?

A: It sounds like your mother jumped to the wrong conclusion. Endometriosis and [ovarian cancer](#) are linked, but the relationship isn't straight cause and effect. Although ovarian cancer occurs at higher rates in women with endometriosis, the overall lifetime risk is low to begin with. Some studies suggest that endometriosis increases that risk, but it's still relatively low.

Although rare, another type of cancer—endometriosis-associated adenocarcinoma—can develop later in life in women who have had endometriosis.

Endometriosis isn't a reason to have a hysterectomy unless you have significant symptoms that are unresponsive to less invasive therapies, and the uterus itself is causing pain or bleeding problems. But endometriosis can be

painful in premenopausal women and should be treated.

Depending on the severity of your endometriosis, treatment options may include:

- Hormonal therapies, such as [birth control pills](#), which help control the hormones that cause a buildup of endometrial tissue—and birth control pills are associated with a decrease in ovarian cancer risk.
- Conservative surgery to remove endometrial growths without removing your [reproductive organs](#)—with [laparoscopic surgery](#) in most cases, or traditional abdominal surgery in more-severe cases.

If you're worried about how endometriosis might affect your fertility, that's a different matter. Endometriosis does cause fertility problems for some women.

Normal conception, pregnancy and delivery are possible after conservative [endometriosis](#) treatment. But if you're having trouble conceiving, you may need to see a fertility specialist to explore your options for becoming pregnant.

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APA citation: Women's wellness: Is endometriosis a risk factor for ovarian cancer? (2018, December 27) retrieved 17 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-12-women-wellness-endometriosis-factor-ovarian.html>

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