

Natural Treatments for Endometriosis: Reduce Your Estrogen Levels

by Kathryn Moloney ND. - Qualified Naturopathic Physician - Thursday, March 30, 2017

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If this article has piqued your interest, you probably have or know somebody who has endometriosis. If so, you're not alone. Endometriosis is a common gynecological disease, which **affects 1 in 10 women** of reproductive age.[1] In this article, I will explain what endometriosis is and will discuss natural treatments for endometriosis – specifically, how to reduce estrogen levels in the body.

So What Is Endometriosis Exactly?

Endometriosis is an estrogen-dependent disease,[2] where endometrial tissue implants and grows outside of the uterus.[3] Endometriosis lesions can implant on various organs, such as ovaries, the pouch of Douglas (the area between the uterus and the rectum), bowel, bladder[4] and fallopian tubes. If that description made your eyes glaze over, here it is again, put more simply. Can you imagine the tissue that is inside the uterus that bleeds every month in menstruating women? Well, in women with endometriosis, some of this tissue travels outside of the uterus and finds a new home, somewhere else in the body. Amazingly, even though this tissue isn't in the uterus any longer, it still bleeds when a woman gets her period. And for most women who have this, it hurts! A lot.

There Are Two Reasons Why Endometriosis Is so Painful:

1. The misplaced endometrial tissue bleeds where it isn't meant to
2. The bleeding endometrial tissue causes chronic inflammation

This inflammation is similar to when you cut yourself and it becomes all red and inflamed; however this happens internally on the organs where the endometriosis is lodged. This chronic inflammation, which can cause scarring and adhesions (it may also bind organs and tissues to each other), contributes to the pain and cause of other problems, such as infertility. [5] The reported prevalence of endometriosis is between **2% and 10%** in the general population and **50% in the infertile population**. [6] There is a genetic risk associated with Endometriosis, with a daughter or sister of a woman with endometriosis having a seven times greater risk of developing endometriosis. [6][1] Because of its chronic and recurrent nature, it places a large burden on the health care system and represents a major challenge to health care providers. [7] Not to mention the impact on the women who have this disease – the symptoms of pain and discomfort can impact their quality of life, work and social lives. More and more, people are seeking alternative and natural treatments for endometriosis.

Medical Treatment for Endometriosis

The need to find natural treatments for endometriosis may be a consequence of the fact that all currently available medical treatments for endometriosis can only suppress the disease, not resolve it. Treatment

involves either pharmaceutical hormonal treatment or surgical intervention. On treatment discontinuation, the recurrence of the symptoms is the rule.[8]

What's the Deal With Estrogen?

Although the exact mechanism for the development of endometriosis remains unclear, there is a large body of research data and circumstantial evidence that suggests a crucial role of estrogen in the establishment and maintenance of this disease.[9] This gives us insight into the natural treatments for endometriosis.

There are 2 important aspects when it comes to [reducing estrogen levels in the body](#):

1. Avoiding the intake of estrogen
2. Increasing the excretion of estrogen

Below you will find information about how to avoid external sources of estrogen, as well as recommendations of ways to reduce the estrogen in your body.

External Sources of Estrogen: Endocrine Disruptors

Have you heard of, or do you know what **endocrine disruptors** are? If not, endocrine is just another word for hormones, such as estrogen, progesterone and testosterone. Put that with disruptor and we're talking about anything that disrupts your hormones. Many different endocrine disruptors (EDs) are present in the environment (air, water and land) and in foods (plants and animals). They may originate from food packaging, the burning of fuels for energy, fertilizers, detergents, chemical industry,[10] plus makeup and personal care products. Growing evidence suggests that endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs) may be the cause of the development and severity of some diseases.[11] Research also suggests that certain EDCs induce proliferation of endometrial cells [12] and contribute to the growth and spread of endometriosis. This is plausible, given that EDCs have the ability to bind to and activate estrogen receptors, which stimulate the development of endometriosis-like lesions.[13] EDCs are estimated to result in 145,000 cases of endometriosis annually in Europe, which cost the European Union approximately €1.41 billion (US 1.5 billion) for the clinical management of endometriosis and fibroids.[14]

Research Shows a Connection Between Endometriosis and the Following EDCs:

- **Sunscreen.** One of the UV filters used in sunscreen reflects a 19% higher chance of endometriosis.[15]
- **BPA's – found in plastics.** Bisphenol-A (BPA) is a commonly found EDC [16] and studies show an association between BPA exposure and endometriosis. [17] According to the CDC, approximately 93% of Americans have detectable levels of BPA in their urine.
- **Phthalates – found in soft plastics, nail polish, fragrances, hair spray & pesticides.** There is a positive association between urinary phthalates and endometriosis.[18]
- **Chromium & Copper (environmental pollutants from industry).** Two trace elements (i.e., chromium and copper) measured in urine are associated with a twofold or higher increased odds of endometriosis.[19]

Banned Chemicals That Are Still Found in the Environment

Both PCB's (polychlorinated bisphenols) and Organochlorine pesticides were proposed as risk factors for endometriosis since the early 1990s.[20] Although their production has long been banned, they are still found in the environment.

- **PCBs – banned industrial chemicals.** Mice studies show that PCBs increase estrogen and inflammation and promote the development of endometriosis lesions.[21]
- **Organochlorine pesticides.** Organochlorine pesticides (long-lasting pesticides and insecticides) can bio-accumulate in fat, particularly into meat, liver and dairy products. [22]

So How Can We Reduce Our Exposure to EDCs?

Given the prevalence of EDCs in our environment, it's difficult to avoid exposure completely. However, we can greatly reduce our exposure by avoiding plastics, commercial sunscreens, nail polish, hair sprays, perfume and non-natural personal care and cleaning products. I will provide more details, later on.

Phytoestrogens and Endometriosis

Before we delve into what we can do to avoid the intake of estrogen and to increase the excretion of estrogen, I'd like to talk about Phytoestrogens, which are in a category all of their own.

Why Are Phytoestrogens Important?

Foods containing phytoestrogens contain a much milder and weaker version of estrogen and help to reduce the effect of estrogen in the body. This milder form of estrogen binds to the estrogen receptor (rather than regular estrogen), therefore it exerts a much milder effect. Because phytoestrogens contain estrogen, it can be thought that eating phytoestrogens will increase estrogen. However, research shows that eating phytoestrogens is safe for people with endometriosis; "Despite endometriosis being an estrogen-dependent disease, we found no evidence that urinary phytoestrogens were associated with a higher risk of an endometriosis diagnosis in either a sample of premenopausal women or in a surgical sample." [23] A study into flaxseeds, one of the richest sources of phytoestrogens, found that they decreased tumors in ovarian cancer (also an estrogen-dependent disease); [24] which is in line with research that shows that flaxseeds help to metabolize estrogen.[25] Studies into soy, another source of phytoestrogens, shows that higher urinary concentrations of soy isoflavones were associated with a decreased risk of advanced-stage endometriosis. Animal studies show that Soy reduces the weight and surface area of endometriosis lesions and reduce estrogen,[26] and a Japanese study showed that dietary isoflavones (phytoestrogens) may reduce the risk of endometriosis among Japanese women.[27] It is important to note that soy products are eaten in small quantities in Japan. For soy to be healthy, it must be organic, GMO free and eaten in a fermented form (miso and tempeh) in small amounts. The following foods are rich in phytoestrogens:

- Flaxseeds/Linseeds
- Legumes ie. Chickpeas, lentils, black beans, kidney beans, mung beans
- Sunflower seeds
- Whole grains ie. Rye, Barley, Oats, Brown rice

How to Reduce Estrogen Naturally

There are two aspects to consider with this. Firstly, what you can do to keep unwanted sources of estrogen out of your body naturally. And secondly, ways to increase excretion of estrogen from your body.

1. How to Keep the Estrogen Out of the Body

Avoid Red Meat & Dairy

An increased risk of endometriosis has been associated with the consumption of red meat and ham.[28] Research also demonstrates that dietary fat excess increases estrogen levels [29] and may strongly affect the incidence of endometriosis. Plus remember before we said that organochlorine pesticides could bio-accumulate in fat, particularly into meat, liver and dairy products? This is another reason to cull the meat and dairy from your diet if you suffer from endometriosis. There are plenty of healthy fats to choose from such as avocado, nuts, seeds, cacao, olive oil and fish.

Eat Organic

Avoid external estrogens found in estrogen-fed poultry and pesticide-sprayed fruits and vegetables, by only eating organic poultry and produce. On the topic of fruit and vegetables, research shows a significant reduction in risk of endometriosis with high intake of green vegetables and fruit.[29.1]

Filter Your Water

There are plenty of good quality under-sink and countertop water filters on the market that will remove a large percentage of the nasties in your water. Choose one that can remove heavy metals, chlorine and fluoride (if it's in your water).

Avoid BPA

Plastics can be harder to avoid than you think! They're everywhere. But if you avoid the following, you'll be doing well:

- Avoid heating your food in plastic containers and avoid food that has been put into plastic when it's hot (that includes takeaway food!)
- Avoid touching receipts from electronic card machines – they're coated in BPA[30]
- Reduce your intake of canned food - the lining of tins contains BPA, unless otherwise noted
- Invest in a stainless steel or glass water bottle and fill from the tap (filtered of course!), rather than buying it in plastic. You'll be doing the environment a favour too.
- The same goes for coffee and tea cups – who doesn't love glass [KeepCups!](#)

Avoid Phthalates

- Avoid non-natural personal care and cleaning products – there are plenty of good quality natural products on the market from cleansers & toners to shampoos... and bathroom cleaners to

dishwashing liquid

- Avoid fragrances - There are some natural perfumes on the market or find an essential oil that you like
- Eat organic (another reason!) – phthalates are used in pesticides, so find an organic store near you (or online) to find your fresh produce, nuts, seeds, grains and legumes.

2. How to Get the Estrogen Out of Your Body

Move Your Body

Regular exercise helps to reduce inflammation and also reduces estrogen levels.[31]

... and Move Those Bowels

Estrogen is broken down by the liver and cleared out of the body through the bowel; so it's imperative to healthy estrogen detoxification that these systems are in tiptop shape. You can get an idea of your liver health by answering the following questions:

1. Could you wait more than ½ before eating when you wake up?
2. Do you feel sluggish or nauseous after eating fatty food?
3. Does alcohol make you feel tired and do you easily get a hangover?
4. Do you easily feel angry or irritable?

If you answer yes to 2 or more of these questions, your liver might be in need of some help, so speak to your Naturopath about what you can do to give your liver a boost. When it comes to the bowels, using them at least once a day is ideal to help clear the estrogen from the body and to prevent it being reabsorbed. Again, speak to your Naturopath if you need some help in this area.

Keep Your Weight in the Healthy Range

Insulin has been shown to stimulate endometrial cell proliferation.[32] High insulin levels occur in many different situations, but if you keep your intake of sugar low, eat protein at every meal and keep your weight in the healthy range, you'll most likely be able to avoid this.

Eat Foods That Help to Detoxify Estrogen

- **TURMERIC** - Curcumin was able to suppress the proliferation of endometrial cells by reducing the E2 value.[33]
- **ST. MARY'S THISTLE** – Helps to improve liver function to help clear estrogen.[34]
- **ROSEMARY** – Rosemary increased liver function and supported detoxification of estrogen in animal studies.[35]
- **GREEN TEA** – Stimulates the liver to detoxify xenobiotics (PCB's, plastics, pesticides, environmental pollutants etc).
- **FIBRE** - Diets rich in fibre increase estrogen excretion[36] because the estrogen binds to the fibre.
- **BRASSICA VEGETABLES** – Brassica family vegetables contain a substance called

indole-3-carbinol. Indole-3-carbinol supports estrogen detoxification to make sure that excess estrogen leaves the body, quick smart.

These vegetables include Broccoli, Cauliflower, Cabbage, Brussel sprouts, Kale, Turnips and Asian greens (such as bok choy and pak choy). Naturopaths have a wide range of natural treatments for endometriosis that help to clear estrogen from the body and therefore reduce the severity of endometriosis. A consultation with your Naturopath can help you find the best treatments for your individual presentation of endometriosis. **If you have endometriosis have you done anything to try to reduce your estrogen levels? And if so, what has been your experience? We'd love to hear from you.**

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