

A From Me and MY Friends To You and Yours Resource:

Endometriosis (En – do – me – tree – o – sis)

What is Endo?

Endometriosis is a condition where the cells usually found on a uterus (also known as a womb) can grow in other places inside your body. Anyone with reproductive organs can develop this condition once they've started their period, however in rare cases, Endo has been found in men as well. Each month these cells react the same way that they normally would by strengthening and then breaking down and bleeding however this blood has no way of leaving the body like it would in a period. This can lead to the organs swelling and creating scarring inside the body, in some worst cases this causes the organs to stick together. Currently there's no known cause for why some people develop Endometriosis, but it's not contagious nor a sexually transmitted disease. Some symptoms of Endo are heavy/painful periods, tiredness, and bowel problems. In some worst cases, it can also lead to infertility problems later in life. It can be extremely painful all year around but especially when the cells are breaking down and bleeding. There's no specific cure for Endo but some people take pain medication or have surgery to ease the symptoms.

How Endo affects ME...

Physically...

I feel uncomfortable most days, Endometriosis can feel like a heavy ache in your lower stomach and the tops of your legs. On my worst days when the cells are bleeding the pain can increase a lot more. Some days the pain can get so bad that I have to stop walking until the worst of it passes. I also get very tired on those days so I can't always leave the house. My stomach gets bloated so I have to wear loose-fitting clothes as my stomach can grow to two sizes bigger than normal and be painful to touch. When you're bleeding that much, it's always a worry that you're going to bleed through your clothes. The pain and migraines can also occasionally keep me from getting out of bed on my worst days. However, with the help of medication and surgery, it's been possible for me to live a somewhat normal life with Endometriosis.

Mentally...

Having Endo can often lead to depression as it can be a very lonely condition. It can feel like you have to miss out on the things that you would normally be doing any other time of the year. I often get upset and angry when people don't understand when I'm in pain or why I've had to miss certain events. Having to take medication just to do daily activities can put someone in a really bad mood. Most days on the month are fine but there are days where I want to hide in my bed all day. That's the days where I need my family and families support.

My Life...

Stress isn't good for anyone but especially for someone with Endometriosis. It can make the pain worse if you're holding yourself tense. I've had to learn how to control my breathing during stressful times or the worst of the pain. This has been a big thing for me to get under control as I used to get myself all worked up.

It's also affected my relationship with family members and romantic partners as they've had to learn how to cope with my condition just as much as I have. One the days that I'm not feeling 100% myself, they've often had to pick up the slack. They end up not only looking after me but also doing all the housework and cooking when it gets too much. I'm lucky that I have friends and family who are willing to hang out with me on my good and my bad days but sometimes it's still hard to ask for their help. Many times I've had to change our plans to go out to staying in our pjs and cooking dinner instead.

3 ways friends can help...

- 1) Don't be too disappointed if your friend has to cancel or change your plans together, usually the person that's had to change it is feeling just as disappointed as you are. It can also be very embarrassing when you have to cancel stuff and explain why. Just

be reassuring your friend that it's not a big deal and that you're happy to be with them no matter what you're doing could mean the world to them.

- 2) Read up on their condition if you have some free time. Even just a google can educate you on confusing conditions like Endometriosis. It can be very tiring and time-consuming having to repeat yourself about your condition to lots of different people so cutting that out could really mean a lot. It would also show them that you want to learn about something that's a big part of their everyday life.
- 3) There's nothing I like more than when people just treat me as their friend despite the condition. I have my bad days but I'm still a person with thoughts and feelings. Chronic illnesses and disabilities can be hard to navigate in friendships, but it doesn't change who your friend is after a diagnosis. It can be frustrating when your friends don't hang out as much anymore or "are always ill" but keep inviting them to events. If you feel uncomfortable talking about chronic illnesses or disabilities, then maybe this is the time to ask why.

Resources for finding out more...

If you would like to find out more about Endo, here's a few places to start:

<https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/> - Information for adults and teenagers

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/endometriosis/> - The NHS webpage for Endo symptoms

<https://bloominuterus.com/> - An American blog where you can read diagnosis stories

It's also worth having a look at some of our blogs, podcasts or socials.

About the Author:

Philippa {she/her} is 21 and lives in England. Originally from Devon, she now splits her time between Northampton and Wiltshire. Recently graduated from the University of Northampton as a Journalism student.

