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Improving lifelong well-being

NHS
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Health

Diet and exercise

Exercise

Exercise, like diet, forms an important part of a healthy lifestyle and is now recognised to be of benefit for many chronic pain conditions, but exercise can also be one of those areas that slip when a woman is suffering from endometriosis symptoms. However, it can be invaluable to fit in even a small amount of gentle exercise into your daily routine, such as swimming or walking. Psychologically, making the effort to do even a small amount of exercise can make a lot of difference. It can be a boost to your confidence and it also means you are getting out and doing something positive, which is helpful.

Exercise releases endorphins, which are the body's natural feel good chemical. Endorphins are chemicals that interact with receptors in the brain to reduce the perception of pain.

Yoga can be beneficial both physically and mentally, as it also involves an awareness of breathing and promotes relaxation. Some women do Pilates, which works on your core muscles and pelvic floor. If you are experiencing pain in this area, it's important that you talk to a clinician before commencing any new programmes of exercise.

Resuming activities that are important to you is essential when you have a disease like endometriosis – whatever it is, whether it is horse riding, dancing, yoga or simply walking, it's helpful to exercise but know your own limits.

Diet

Avoiding processed foods and alcohol, as well as choosing fresh, naturally available foods and a wide range of vegetables in particular, is recognised as an important part of any healthy balanced diet. Many women with endometriosis try dietary measures to improve their symptom control - sometimes this approach can be successful – and sustainable.

Sadly, there is no scientific basis to guide women, or support, dietary measures for the treatment of endometriosis specifically. However, we are very aware that some women find this a really important part of their own self-management plan, and it is worth talking to your GP, clinical nurse specialist or consultant about making dietary changes, if you're thinking of doing this.

Some women with endometriosis have benefited from a diet that helps people with IBS, called the 'low FODMAP diet'. This is a diet that is recognised to help IBS sufferers. FODMAP refers to 'fermentable, oligosaccharides, disaccharides, mono-saccharides and polyols'. These are carbohydrates that are found in a wide range of foods, such as onions, garlic, wheat, rye, beans, lentils, milk and certain fruits and vegetables. It's important to seek the advice of health professionals, as this diet would normally be followed under the guidance of a dietician.