

Endometriosis: Evolving Management Approaches

Sannamma H J^{1*}

¹Assistant Professor, Government College of Nursing, Vijayapur

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*Corresponding author: Sannamma H J

Assistant Professor, Government College of Nursing, Vijayapur

Abstract

Endometriosis is a chronic, estrogen-dependent inflammatory disorder that affects nearly 10% of individuals of reproductive age worldwide. It is associated with severe pelvic pain, infertility, and profound psychosocial burden. Despite the absence of a definitive cure, recent evidence underscores the importance of prevention, early intervention, and comprehensive management. Strategies such as lifestyle modification, dietary interventions, hormonal suppression, and early diagnostic practices have shown potential in reducing disease incidence, severity, and recurrence. This review integrates current insights into pathophysiology, preventive measures, systemic effects, infertility, and therapeutic approaches, highlighting the need for a holistic, multidisciplinary framework spanning primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.

Keywords: Endometriosis; Pathophysiology; Prevention; Infertility; Mental health; Multidisciplinary management; Precision medicine; Recurrence.

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INTRODUCTION

Endometriosis is defined by the presence of endometrial-like tissue outside the uterine cavity, triggering inflammation, adhesions, and chronic pain, often culminating in infertility. Beyond reproductive health, it exerts systemic impacts, including gastrointestinal dysfunction, mood disorders, and elevated cardiovascular risks. Since curative therapies remain elusive, preventive and multidisciplinary strategies are increasingly emphasized to mitigate disease progression and improve quality of life.

Etiologic Insights and Risk Factors

Multiple genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences contribute to disease onset.

- **Reproductive and hormonal factors:** Early menarche, short cycles, nulliparity, and low BMI increase susceptibility.
- **Genetic predisposition:** Family history elevates risk by six- to nine-fold.
- **Congenital anomalies:** Reproductive tract malformations predispose to retrograde flow.
- **Environmental influences:** Endocrine-disrupting chemicals are emerging as potential contributors, though causality remains under investigation.

Pathophysiology

Endometriosis arises from interconnected biological processes:

- **Retrograde menstruation vs. stem cell theory:** Sampson's classic model explains peritoneal lesions, whereas stem cell theory accounts for extrapelvic disease via progenitor cells.
- **Immune dysfunction:** Aberrant macrophages, cytokine overexpression (IL-1 β , TNF- α), and impaired NK-cell activity facilitate lesion survival.
- **Hormonal imbalance:** Estrogen dominance and progesterone resistance perpetuate inflammation and cellular proliferation.
- **Genetics and epigenetics:** GWAS highlight loci such as *WNT4*, *GREB1*, and *VEZT*; epigenetic dysregulation (DNA methylation, miRNA alterations) modifies immune and endocrine pathways.
- **Gut microbiome:** Dysbiosis alters estrogen metabolism and systemic inflammation, providing a novel pathogenic perspective.

Preventive Strategies

Primary Prevention – Delaying Onset and Reducing Risk

- **Lifestyle modification:** Regular physical activity and smoking cessation reduce risk.
- **Dietary measures:**
 - Omega-3 fatty acids lower risk by ~22%.

- Diets rich in antioxidants (vitamins C, D, E) may alleviate symptoms.
- High intake of red/processed meat increases risk, whereas dairy intake appears protective.
- **Hormonal modulation:** Continuous hormonal contraceptives suppress retrograde menstruation.
- **Reproductive factors:** Pregnancy and lactation confer temporary protective effects.

Secondary Prevention – Early Detection and Control

- **Awareness and education:** Early recognition of severe dysmenorrhea, especially in adolescents and those with family history.
- **Imaging advances:** Transvaginal ultrasound and MRI are recommended as first-line diagnostic tools.
- **Biomarkers:** Circulating miRNAs and liquid biopsies are under development for early disease detection.

Tertiary Prevention – Reducing Recurrence and Optimizing Quality of Life

- **Post-surgical suppression:** Prolonged hormonal therapy reduces recurrence rates.
- **Fertility preservation:** Oocyte and ovarian tissue cryopreservation are vital for women at high risk.
- **Self-care strategies:** A low-FODMAP diet relieves gastrointestinal symptoms in many patients.
- **Psychological support:** Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and mindfulness improve coping and quality of life.

Endometriosis and Infertility

Infertility affects 30–50% of affected women. Mechanisms include pelvic adhesions, defective folliculogenesis, impaired implantation, and altered endometrial receptivity.

- **Impact on ART outcomes:** Severe disease reduces oocyte yield and pregnancy rates.
- **Recent advances:**
 - Personalized ovarian stimulation minimizes iatrogenic damage.
 - AI-driven embryo selection improves implantation prediction.
 - Fertility preservation before repeat surgeries is increasingly advocated.

Mental Health Considerations

The chronic pain and reproductive challenges of endometriosis heighten vulnerability to depression, anxiety, OCD, and even suicidality.

- **Biological mechanisms:** Pain-induced HPA axis disruption leads to neurotransmitter imbalance.
- **Emerging evidence (2024–25):** Pre-pregnancy endometriosis correlates with increased postpartum psychiatric disorders.
- **Clinical implications:** Routine integration of mental health screening and interventions is essential within gynecological practice.

Endometriosis as a Systemic Condition

Endometriosis extends beyond gynecology, influencing multiple organ systems:

- **Cardiovascular:** Increased risk of hypertension, stroke, and atherosclerosis.
- **Autoimmune:** Strong associations with thyroid disease, lupus, and rheumatoid arthritis.
- **Gastrointestinal:** IBS-like symptoms are frequent.
- **Musculoskeletal:** Fatigue syndromes and fibromyalgia often overlap.

Current and Emerging Management Approaches

Medical Therapy

- **Hormonal therapy:** Combined oral contraceptives, progestins, GnRH antagonists.
- **Pain control:** NSAIDs and multimodal regimens.

Surgical Options

- Laparoscopic or robotic-assisted excision for symptom relief and fertility improvement.
- High recurrence rates remain a challenge.

Emerging Therapies

- **Immunomodulators and biologics:** Anti-TNF and IL-6 inhibitors.
- **Non-hormonal agents:** Angiogenesis inhibitors and epigenetic modulators.
- **Precision models:** Patient-derived organoids for individualized drug testing.

Psychological and Nursing Interventions

- Counseling, CBT, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and peer support groups.
- Nurses play pivotal roles in education, adherence support, and lifestyle guidance.

Future Perspectives

The future of endometriosis care lies in:

- Genomic and biomarker-driven precision medicine.
- Non-invasive diagnostics (AI-assisted imaging, liquid biopsy).
- Integration of reproductive and mental health services.
- Multidisciplinary care models uniting gynecology, psychiatry, endocrinology, and nursing.
- A strong emphasis on prevention to reduce global disease burden.

CONCLUSION

Endometriosis is increasingly recognized as a complex systemic condition rather than a localized pelvic disease. Effective management demands preventive, holistic, and multidisciplinary strategies. Lifestyle and dietary interventions, early detection, and recurrence prevention—combined with precision medicine and mental health integration—offer the most promising path forward in reducing morbidity, infertility, and psychosocial distress associated with the disease.

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