

can develop and bind internal organs such as the fallopian tubes, ovaries, uterus, bowels and the bladder to each other.

- Chronic pain. In some cases endometriotic lesions can develop their own nerve supply, creating a direct and two-way interaction between the lesions and the central nervous system. In these cases there is often a more or less constant pelvic or abdominal pain that is unrelated to the menstrual cycle. However, pain levels can increase at the time of a period as endometrial lesions elsewhere in the pelvis or abdomen respond to hormonal stimulation and begin to break down.
- Sub-fertility. Many women who have issues conceiving have endometriosis. It is easy to assume that the anatomical distortions and adhesions caused by endometriosis will cause compromised fertility, but in practice there is often no clear link between endometriosis and sub-fertility (from a Western medicine point of view).

ENDOMETRIOSIS IN CHINESE MEDICINE

The earliest mention of the term ‘blood stasis’ (Xue Dao; literally, uterus-related diseases) can be found in Chapter 75 of the *Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine)*. Endometriosis was not recorded in any of the classical Chinese medical texts as a defined entity, but the symptoms are, and always have been, treated under the categories of dysmenorrhoea, irregular menstruation, abdominal mass and infertility.

In his book *The Genius of China: 3,000 Years of Science, Discovery, and Invention*, a popular distillation of Joseph Needham and his collaborators, Robert Temple states:

In China, indisputable and voluminous textual evidence exists to prove that the circulation of the blood was an established doctrine by the second BC at the latest. For the idea to have become elaborated by this time, however, into the full and complex doctrine that appears in *The Yellow Emperor’s Manual of Corporeal Medicine* (China’s equivalent of the Hippocratic writings of Greece), the original notion must have appeared a

very long time previously. It is safe to say that the idea occurred in China about two thousand years before it found acceptance in the West. (Temple 2007)

Endometriosis results from the stagnation of Blood flow in the pelvis and abdominal regions. The Liver, Spleen and Kidney Channels all run through the pelvis and lower abdomen, and if any of these is blocked, congested or deficient, this will usually manifest in women as some sort of menstrual problem (see the 'Channel theory' section in Chapter 4).

DIETARY CONSIDERATIONS

Trans fats

Most Western diets contain too many trans fats (the fat found in processed food), and many medical practitioners feel these are the root cause of chronic inflammation, including that typically occurring with endometriosis.

Trans fats block the production of type 1 and 3 prostaglandins, which are derived from omega-3 and 6 fats. These fight inflammation (as well as benefiting the hormonal system). Trans fats don't, however, block the production of type 2 prostaglandins that increase inflammation.

An article by Stacey A. Missmer, published in *Human Reproduction*, confirms this link between trans fats and endometriosis. Missmer studied 12 years of data from the Nurses' Health Study II (a total of 70,709 women contributed 586,153 person-years of data):

...1199 cases of laparoscopically confirmed endometriosis were reported. Although total fat consumption was not associated with endometriosis risk, those women in the highest fifth of longchain omega-3 fatty acid consumption were 22% less likely to be diagnosed with endometriosis compared with those with the lowest fifth of intake. In addition, those in the highest quintile of trans-unsaturated fat intake were 48% more likely to be diagnosed with endometriosis. (Missmer 2010)

The most likely explanation for this is that trans fats increase circulating levels of several inflammatory markers. These affect

other tissue as well, for example those in your bowel or heart, so trans fats are bad all round.

Prostaglandins

Prostaglandins are a group of compounds that have diverse hormone-like effects in animals, including humans. They are made at the sites of tissue damage and control processes such as inflammation, blood flow, the formation of blood clots and the induction of labour. Prostaglandins break down into three different forms: E₁ (PGE₁), E₂ (PGE₂) and F_{2a} (PGF_{2a}). While PGE₁ can help alleviate endometriosis symptoms, PGE₂ causes pain and PGF_{2a} can cause vomiting, nausea and diarrhoea.

The goal of a controlled diet is to reduce the amount of inflammatory prostaglandins in your system, and by changing your diet, it is possible to block PGE₂ and PGF_{2a} while encouraging the production of PGE₁ to help symptoms. One of the easiest ways of doing this is by changing the types of oils that are taken into your diet. These oils are composed of omega-3 fatty acids, which lead to positive prostaglandin production. Good sources of omega-3 fatty acids include tofu, walnuts, flaxseeds/oil and chia seeds.

It is also important to decrease your intake of those fatty acids that will stimulate an inflammatory response. These are commonly found in saturated fats, butter, animal and organ meat as well as lard. In short, your diet should largely consist of vegetables, nuts, fruit and fish, with very little red meat. This doesn't mean that you can never eat a steak again (assuming you want to), however; as with most dietary restrictions, once the symptoms cease, you can reintroduce animal products. Most women will find a level of saturated fat that they can tolerate without aggravating their endometriosis.

Prostaglandins and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs work by blocking all prostaglandin production. If your period pain or any other symptoms of endometriosis are lessened by taking NSAIDs such as aspirin or ibuprofen, try taking a

high-quality cold-pressed omega-3 supplement and see what it does for your pain levels.

Fibre

A diet high in fibre can decrease total circulating oestrogens and xenoestrogen; this should help relieve much of the pain associated with endometriosis.

VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS

For a full listing of the actions of common supplements according to Chinese medical theory, see Appendix B.

Although the best source of vitamins and minerals is through a well-balanced diet, many foods today are lacking in these vital trace elements. A point I always try and stress to people is that cheap supplements are cheap for a reason. Discount supplements often use raw ingredients that are low quality and have a poor level of absorption.

The following supplements may be of use in treating the symptoms of endometriosis:

Vitamin A: Helps thin blood and reduces clotting.

B vitamins: Reported to improve the emotional symptoms of endometriosis, and have proved helpful in dealing with premenstrual tension (PMT). Take a B complex rather than individual B vitamins.

Vitamin C: Well known for helping to boost the immune system and providing resistance to disease. It is also used in the body to build and maintain collagen.

Vitamin E: Plays an important role by increasing oxygen-carrying capacities and also strengthens the immune system.

Calcium: Levels of calcium in menstruating women decrease 10 to 14 days before the onset of menstruation. Deficiency may lead to muscle cramps, headache or pelvic pain. Take a

supplement that combines calcium and magnesium as they work in tandem.

Iron: Women with endometriosis tend to have very heavy periods that can lead to iron deficiency. This can lead to anaemia, which is characterised by extreme fatigue and weakness.

Magnesium: Can help stop muscle cramps and spasm.

Selenium: When taken together with vitamin E, this has been reported to decrease inflammation associated with endometriosis.

Zinc: Essential for normal enzyme activity within the body. If you are deficient in zinc, it is highly likely that you are suffering from hormonal imbalances.

THERAPEUTIC RECIPES

For a complete listing of the energetic qualities and uses in Chinese medicine of most common foods, see Appendix A.

Breakfast

Porridge made with water and sprinkled with cinnamon. Porridge is warming in nature; it improves digestive function and Blood circulation. Cinnamon improves Blood circulation in the smaller vessels such as those in the fingers, toes or around the reproductive organs.

Walnuts and/or cashews in natural yoghurt. Although yoghurt is considered cold in nature, both walnuts and cashews are warming. It is important to choose yoghurt with no added sugar and with live bacteria.

Lunch

Salad: Many salad vegetables are cold in nature (this can slow down digestive function and impair the movement of Qi and Blood),

but the addition of onions, garlic, ginger, chilli or peppers can mediate the cooling action of the vegetables.

Try some of the following combinations:

Carrot, apple and ginger

Carrot and radish

Duck, watercress and orange

Guacamole

Mixed beans with chilli

Prawns with bean sprouts

Dinner



STIR-FRIED NOODLES WITH ASPARAGUS

Ingredients

- ▶ 100 g (3½ oz) fresh rice noodles
- ▶ 60 g (2 oz) asparagus, trimmed and cut into 5 cm (2 inch) slices
- ▶ 2 tsp toasted sesame oil
- ▶ 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- ▶ 2 cm (¾ inch) fresh root ginger, grated or finely chopped
- ▶ 2 tbsp rice wine (or sherry)
- ▶ 2 tbsp soy sauce
- ▶ 1 tbsp miso paste
- ▶ 2 tbsp sesame seeds, toasted
- ▶ black pepper

Method

1. Cook the noodles in plenty of boiling, salted water until tender, and keep warm.
2. Add the asparagus and sesame oil to a frying pan or wok, and cook over a medium heat until tender.
3. Add the garlic, ginger, rice wine, soy sauce and miso paste, stirring for a couple of minutes.
4. Sprinkle with the toasted sesame seeds, season and serve.

Therapeutic qualities

Asparagus: Clears Heat and promotes Blood circulation.

Miso: Promotes the proper movement of urine and tonifies Qi.

Black pepper, garlic and ginger: Warming in nature and move stagnant Blood.

Sesame seeds and oil: Act as an envoy, guiding the actions of the other ingredients to their target organs (Kidneys and Liver).

Rice noodles and soy sauce: Clear Empty Heat and reduce swelling.

Rice wine: Moves Qi and Blood, and thus stops pain.



VEGETABLE AND NOODLE STIR FRY

Ingredients

- ▶ 100 g (3½ oz) fresh rice noodles
- ▶ 1 medium head pak choi (bok choy) (or cabbage), cut into strips
- ▶ 1 tbsp sesame oil
- ▶ 6 shiitake mushrooms, sliced
- ▶ 2 cm (¾ inch) fresh root ginger, grated or finely chopped
- ▶ 2 cloves garlic, grated or finely chopped
- ▶ 1 whole dried red chilli, seeded and finely sliced
- ▶ 1 tbsp rice wine (or sherry)
- ▶ 1 tbsp soy sauce
- ▶ 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- ▶ 2 tbsp toasted sesame oil
- ▶ 1 spring onion (scallion), finely sliced
- ▶ 2 tbsp sesame seeds, toasted
- ▶ black pepper

Method

1. Cook the noodles in plenty of boiling, salted water until tender, and keep warm.
2. Steam the pak choi, and keep warm.
3. Heat the sesame oil in a frying pan or wok, and fry the shiitake mushrooms, ginger, garlic, chilli, rice wine and soy sauce until fragrant (about 30 seconds).

4. Add the cooked noodles and pak choi.
5. Mix in the balsamic vinegar and toasted sesame oil, and garnish with the spring onion and toasted sesame seeds. Season and serve.

Therapeutic qualities

Shiitake mushrooms: Well known as a stimulant that improves Qi and Blood circulation. Biomedical research shows that a compound within shiitake mushrooms (lentinan) inhibits the production of cancerous cells, and this is already being used by the Japanese pharmaceutical company Ajinomoto to treat stomach cancers. If the autoimmune theory of what causes endometriosis is correct, the cure may lie in medicinal mushrooms.

Garlic, chilli, ginger and spring onion: All have blood-thinning and blood-moving qualities.

Rice noodles and soy sauce: Clear Empty Heat and reduce swelling.

Pak choi: Clears any stagnant Heat via the Intestines.

Sesame seeds and oil: Act as an envoy, guiding the actions of the other ingredients to their target organs (Kidneys and Liver; see Chapter 3).



PINEAPPLE CURRY

Ingredients

- ▶ 1 tbsp curry paste (see below)
- ▶ 2 cloves garlic, unpeeled
- ▶ olive oil
- ▶ 500 g (1 lb) pineapple, diced
- ▶ 60 g (2 oz) sweetcorn
- ▶ 10 mushrooms (button mushrooms work well)
- ▶ ½ onion, finely sliced
- ▶ 1 tsp dried thyme
- ▶ ½ tsp paprika
- ▶ sea salt
- ▶ 1 tbsp soy sauce
- ▶ 2 tsp cornflour (cornstarch)

CURRY PASTE

- 20 ml (½ fl oz) sunflower oil
- 1 red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, grated or finely chopped
- 2 cm (¼ inch) fresh root ginger, grated or finely chopped
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp ground black pepper
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon

Method

1. Blend all the ingredients for the curry paste, and set aside.
2. Drizzle the garlic cloves with a little olive oil, wrap in foil and roast at 190°C/Gas Mark 5/375°F for 15 minutes. Once cooked, squeeze out the garlic paste and set aside.
3. Heat the olive oil in a large pan over a medium heat, add the pineapple, sweetcorn, mushrooms, onion, curry paste, thyme, paprika, sea salt, soy sauce and roasted garlic paste, and cook for 10 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, combine the cornflour with a little water, and stir to make a smooth paste.
5. Reduce the heat to low and add the cornflour mix to the pan. Stir constantly until thickened. Serve.

Therapeutic qualities

Pineapple: Clears Empty Heat and builds Body Fluids.

Sweetcorn: Promotes urination and clears Heat.

Mushrooms: Clear Toxic Heat and nourish the Kidneys.

Soy sauce: Clears Empty Heat.



SALMON CURRY

Ingredients

- 1 tsp cornflour (cornstarch)
- 1 tsp curry powder
- 150 g (5 oz) salmon fillet, cut into thick strips
- sesame oil
- ½ small onion, halved and sliced lengthways
- 1 tsp fresh root ginger, grated or finely chopped
- 1 tsp garlic, grated or finely chopped
- sea salt
- 60 ml (2 fl oz) chicken, fish or vegetable stock
- 1 tbsp curry paste (see above)
- ½ green pepper (bell pepper), cut into strips
- ½ red pepper (bell pepper), cut into strips

Method

1. Combine the cornflour and curry powder with water, and mix to make a smooth paste.
2. Place the salmon strips in a bowl. Add half of the cornflour and curry powder mixture and coat the salmon.
3. Heat the sesame oil in a wok or frying pan and fry the salmon for a few minutes on each side, until golden brown. Drain the oil and discard.
4. Add more sesame oil to the frying pan or wok and fry the onion, ginger and garlic (about 30 seconds).
5. Add the sea salt, stock, curry paste and remaining cornflour and curry powder mixture, and mix well. Toss in the peppers and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add the salmon strips and toss gently to coat with the sauce. Serve.

Therapeutic qualities

Salmon: Nourishes Blood and Yin.

Green and red peppers: Promote Blood circulation and reduce swelling.

Ginger and garlic: Move Blood and help relieve pain.

Curry paste: Moves Blood and helps relieve pain.