NATURAL THERAPIES
FOR THE TREATMENT
OF ENDOMETRIOSIS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This booklet was a co-production of the Women’s Health Resource Collective (now Women’s Health Victoria) and Assunta Hunter of The Women’s Clinic on Richmond Hill, 366 Church Street, Richmond, 3121.


Originally produced by Juliane Carey at the Women’s Health Resource Collective with thanks to Debbie Milligan, Brenda Dobia, Ros Wood, Shannon Kerrigan, Healthsharing Women, Jennie Swain, Di Van Vliet, Steve Clavey, Jo Wainer, Sue Evans, Cherry Blaskett, Dr Mary Wingfield, Lee Hanton, Barbara Younger, Iathie Rea and Mirella Marini.

Women’s Health Victoria* produces and distributes publications on women’s health. A publication list is available.

* Postal address: GPO Box 1160K, Melbourne 3001. Telephone: 9662 3755.

LIST OF CONTENTS

Introduction 2
What is endometriosis? 2
  Diagnosis 3
  What causes endometriosis? 3
Natural therapy treatment 3
What are natural therapies? 4
  Herbal medicine 4
  Homoeopathy 5
  Nutrition 5
  Traditional Chinese medicine 5
  Ayurveda medicine 6
  Chiropractic 6
  Massage 6
  Yoga 8
Choosing a natural therapist 8
Self-help 9
  Diet 9
  Herbs 10
  Exercise 10
Mind, body and emotions 10
  Support groups 10
  Sex 11
  Relaxation 11
Referrals 12
Further reading 13
INTRODUCTION

This booklet is designed to assist you to make informed choices about natural therapy treatment for endometriosis. Natural therapies are treatments other than those provided by Western-trained medical doctors. The booklet describes how endometriosis is treated by a variety of natural therapies and what you can expect if you choose to consult a natural therapist or alternative practitioner. It also lists some self-help methods that may be useful if it is not possible for you to consult with a natural therapist, or to use in conjunction with natural therapy methods, and information on choosing a natural therapist.

Many women choose natural therapies instead of surgery and drugs, or use natural therapies as well as medical treatment. Often natural therapies are a way that women can contribute to the healing process and thus feel more in control.

WHAT IS ENDOMETRIOSIS?

During menstruation, the endometrial tissue that normally lines your womb (uterus) is shed. Endometriosis is a condition in which this endometrial tissue is found in places other than your uterus, such as your ovaries, Fallopian tubes, lining of the pelvis, and pelvic ligaments, and less commonly in your bowel or intestinal lining or on the surface of your bladder. If you have endometriosis, this endometrial tissue will continue to respond to hormonal stimulation and will build up and shed cyclically, just like the endometrial tissue in your uterus. This monthly cycle of bleeding in the endometrial tissue can lead to the formation of cysts, scar tissue, adhesions, and areas of inflammation. Occasionally the Fallopian tubes may become twisted and sometimes, though rarely, blocked.

"I'm two different women; before I ovulate it's fine but from then on I'm always tired and irritable and always in pain."

"I'd do anything to stop the pain."

Endometriosis is often a chronic and painful condition. For many women the most striking symptom may be severe abdominal pain, which can be worse in the week or two before you get your period (this is the latter half of your menstrual cycle). Everyone has a different experience of this pain. Some women describe it as a sharp, stabbing or cutting pain and often find it so severe that it makes it difficult to go on with everyday life.

You may also experience pain in your pelvis and back; or have pain during sexual intercourse (this is called dyspareunia). In some cases, you can have pain when you urinate and with bowel movements because of where the tissue has spread, and the amount and extent of the scarring. You could also be prone to menstrual disorders such as heavy and/or erratic bleeding.

Sometimes, there may be no obvious symptoms but you may not be able to get pregnant and endometriosis may be suspected. Endometriosis is one of the leading causes of infertility in women aged between 25 and 45.
DIAGNOSIS

Endometriosis affects many women in Australia, but it is often misdiagnosed. If you suspect you have endometriosis you can only be medically diagnosed by having a laparoscopy. This is the insertion of a fibre-optic tube (a tiny telescope-like instrument) into your upper abdomen, which enables the surgeon to actually see the endometriosis. In some cases treatment may be considered without this diagnosis. For further information, refer Further reading page 13.

WHAT CAUSES ENDOMETRIOSIS?

There are a number of theories about the cause of endometriosis. They include the possibility that menstrual blood and tissue flows into your Fallopian tubes (this is called reflux, retrograde or backward flow), or that endometrial tissue is transplanted to other areas by surgery or by your body’s circulation.

There are a number of other factors that may predispose you to endometriosis. If you have close relatives (for example, a mother or sister) with endometriosis, you are more likely to develop endometriosis and it is more likely to be severe.

Factors associated with your immune system may be important. Normally, your immune system will destroy endometrial tissue that goes outside your uterus. However, in certain kinds of specific problems associated with the immune system, endometrial tissue may not be destroyed.

NATURAL THERAPY TREATMENT

Western medical treatment for endometriosis includes surgery and hormonal drugs. However, there are many other ways of treating endometriosis, often loosely called 'natural' or 'alternative' therapies. Many women have used natural therapies with success for the treatment of endometriosis.

A natural therapist may describe endometriosis as a condition brought about by long-term stress and hormonal imbalance. The therapist will try to balance and restore organs, such as the liver, and the lymphatic and endocrine systems, and to stimulate circulation to the pelvic organs. Long-term imbalances in your diet and vitamin deficiencies can aggravate your symptoms. Symptoms can also be made worse by poor liver function and a sluggish lymphatic system.

The basis of treatment by a natural therapist will be to balance the hormonal cycle, restore the nervous system and cleanse the body ...

There are some symptoms which a natural therapist may consider and give you treatment for, but which have not received much attention in mainstream Western medicine. The first is poor liver function (as shown by a pasta history of hepatitis, poor fat and alcohol tolerance and sometimes also a history or glandular fever). The second is premenstrual syndrome or tension (PMS or PMT) or other evidence of hormonal imbalances.

While treatment is always individual, the basis of treatment by a natural therapist will be to balance the hormonal cycle, restore the nervous system and cleanse the body.
Treating your endometriosis with natural therapies may be a long-term process that requires you to participate more in your own therapy. All natural therapies emphasise the importance of an improvement in your general level of health and your involvement in that improvement. One reason you may prefer natural therapies is because they encourage you to take control of your own treatment.

**WHAT ARE NATURAL THERAPIES?**

The term 'natural therapies' encompasses a wide variety of therapeutic styles. The natural therapies that are explained in more detail in the following pages are herbal medicine, homoeopathy, nutrition, traditional Chinese medicine including acupuncture, Ayurvedic medicine (the traditional medicine of India), chiropractic treatment, massage and yoga. You may come across the term 'naturopath'. This is someone who combines a number of natural therapy techniques (for example diet, herbal medicine and homoeopathy).

All natural therapies are similar in their belief in the body’s capacity to heal itself and all use a variety of techniques and medicines which attempt to support the body’s ‘vital energy’. They have in common what is often called a ‘holistic approach’ - that is, they all take into account your individual social, emotional and spiritual situation as well as physical symptoms. Our emotional and spiritual lives are often neglected by Western medicine.

The other common element of all of these kinds of treatment is their belief that they should do no harm. Accordingly, their medicines tend to be drawn from natural sources (for example, plants) and their methods are as non-invasive as possible. This means they would not use surgery, diagnostic tests that are invasive to the body, or medicines that are incompatible with the way the body works.

Each one of these therapies may be used with other therapies or as a complete method in itself. Most therapies may be used in conjunction with Western medicine or instead of surgery and hormonal treatments. However, this is something that you should check with your natural therapist as there are some kinds of treatment that cannot be combined with hormonal treatment.

As a part of your treatment a natural therapist will usually try to help you resolve the emotional issues and concerns that may contribute to your condition and help you to feel healthy and at ease with your body. This can involve counselling and also techniques such as relaxation, visualisation and exercise.

**HERBAL MEDICINE**

Herbal medicine is one of the most ancient healing arts used by the human race - and one that has been used particularly by women. Plants offer a variety of medicinal properties and may be abundant sources of minerals and vitamins and plant hormones. They are most effective when a herbalist prepares a herbal prescription which is specifically designed for you. This may be in either dried herb form (tablets or teas) or in an alcohol and water extract of the plant (called a tincture). A tincture is a more concentrated extract of the herb that has a longer shelf life and is consequently, the form preferred by many herbalists.

“I’ve always had really heavy periods - and it’s always made period time a real worry. But this herbal treatment I’ve had is terrific. It’s made it so much easier.”
Another form of herbal medicine that is also widely used is Flower Essences. These are very dilute preparations of flowers that are prescribed for the emotional aspects of a condition; they treat the feelings that accompany symptoms or are associated with a specific condition. They are a way of helping to transform and resolve these feelings and thus to help the healing process.

Herbal medicine has much to offer women who have endometriosis. It can be useful as a treatment for pain, heavy bleeding, scarring and infertility and ultimately as a way of restoring hormonal balance and health.

The main aims of herbal therapy will be to reduce adhesions and scarring, to stimulate tissue healing and to balance hormones. The later is achieved in part by using a variety of plant hormones and also by using different herbs in the first half of the menstrual cycle to those used in the second half of the cycle.

The use of flower essences in conjunction with herbal tinctures can be a powerful way of supporting the emotional changes that assist the healing process. Some of the flower essences used specifically in the treatment of endometriosis include Scarlet Monkey Flower, Calla Lily, Mariposa Lily and Tiger Lily. They all deal with unresolved feelings about sexuality, relationships and body image that are sometimes associated with endometriosis.

A herbalist can offer you some assistance in choosing a long-term strategy (dietary and herbal) which is appropriate for you as an individual, and the support and resources to pursue these changes. In most cases you will find that after two or three consultations you should be able to manage your symptoms on your own. You can then have consultations on an occasion basis with your herbalist to reassess your symptoms and prescription, and to receive ongoing support and advice.

HOMOEOPATHY

Homoeopathy is a system of therapeutics based on the law of treating 'like with like'. This is called the 'law of similars'. The theory behind homoeopathy is that a substance that creates a set of symptoms in a healthy person when given in a substantial dose, will cure similar symptoms in a sick person when given in specially prepared tiny doses. Homoeopathy utilises small doses of substances that are individually chosen to deeply stimulate your own immune system and powers of recovery.

Homoeopathic medicines work by stimulating the person as a whole. Unlike conventional medicines they do not suppress symptoms but stimulate your vital force, thereby helping you to cure yourself. These medicines may be made from minerals, fresh plant tinctures and sometimes, animal products.

One of the principles of homoeopathy is that people vary in their response to an illness according to their basic temperament. Therefore a homoeopath does not automatically prescribe a specific remedy for a specific illness. Instead it is important to determine an individual’s response and prescribe on that basis.

To treat chronic conditions, such as endometriosis, a remedy that has a deep action is used. This is called a constitutional remedy. This remedy takes into account your complete mental, physical and emotional state and hence facilitates healing on all levels.

Acute symptoms such as pain, heavy bleeding, mood swings, bloating, premenstrual symptoms and bowel upsets can be treated effectively with what is called an acute remedy. These can replace the need for painkillers, laxatives, sedatives and anti-depressants. Some examples of commonly used acute remedies are Magnesium Phosphate, Chamomile, Helonias, Sepia and Cimicifuga.
NUTRITION

Natural therapies use nutrition as a way of making sure that any mineral and vitamin deficiencies you have are addressed. Nutrition is also used to promote the health and well-being of the whole person. The idea that you may have specific nutritional needs according to your physical type, the sort of work you do and your stage of life is a common one. Many naturopaths will help you to create a diet to suit your needs.

In general, recommendations will include advice to eat fresh, unprocessed foods, whose nutritional value has been affected as little as possible by pesticides, additives, preservatives and processing. Lots of fresh fruit and vegetables and whole grains are considered to be a sound basis for a diet high in fibre, minerals and vitamins and low in fats, sugar and salts. Some animal proteins and dairy foods are often excluded on a temporary basis as a way of lightening the body's digestive load and thus encouraging improved elimination.

Refer Self-help, page 8, for more nutritional ideas that you can follow yourself.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Traditional Chinese medicine is a form of treatment used in China for the last 2,000 years. Diagnosis and treatment are based upon Chinese medical principles. Chinese medicine believes that energy flows through the body along channels called the meridians. The flow of energy is called the 'Qi' (pronounced 'chi'). Blockages in this energy flow can cause problems and conditions that are described as being associated with the elements; for example, heat, cold and air.

Chinese medicine includes the use of acupuncture as well as Chinese herbal medicine and a variety of other techniques such as massage and moxibustion. Acupuncture is the use of very fine metal needles that are inserted into the meridians that cross the body. Moxibustion is the burning of sticks of herbs over certain points of the body to warm or increase the energy flow at that point and in the body generally.

Diagnosis is determined by taking a detailed case history as well as readings of the pulse and the tongue.

Each combination of Chinese herbs is precisely designed for the individual. Rather than the alcoholic extracts of herbs often used by Western herbal medicine, Chinese herbal medicines usually use decoctions. You prepare the herbs yourself by boiling them into a soup, which is usually taken morning and night. Despite the effort and the, often unpleasant, taste of the herbs, many women find the preparation of their own treatment to be very rewarding.

Endometriosis did not exist as a diagnosis in Chinese medicine until modern times. However, it would have been treated according to its presenting symptoms and signs. The condition can be described as 'blood stagnation' or 'blood deficiency'.

Stress is considered an important factor in blood stagnation because of the act of tensing muscles tends to slow the flow of energy - the Qi. The slow down in the Qi flow will lead to a slow down in blood flow and eventual stagnation.

There can be other complicating facts such as heat or cold imbalance and weakness in certain parts of the body, especially in the kidneys that in Chinese medicine are considered to be important to the reproductive system.

A doctor of Chinese medicine will try to encourage your inherent ability to heal and cope with your condition through the use of herbs or acupuncture. The doctor will probably advice you to try to eliminate as much stress as possible, which in the traditional Chinese medicine view will reduce the chance of further blood stagnation.
AYURVEDA MEDICINE

Ayurveda is one of the traditional medicine systems of India. Its practice incorporates dietary advice, herbal therapeutics and yoga. It can be used as a complete system in itself (in much the same way as traditional Chinese medicine) or aspects of the therapy, such as yoga, can be used in conjunction with other techniques.

As a system, Ayurveda describes health and disease in terms of the balance of five elements - earth, water, fire, air and ether. Each person has a particular constitutional type (a Dosha) which is a balance of these elements and which determines not only their basic attributes but also what disease they may be predisposed to, if any.

An Ayurvedic physician will take a detailed case history to determine the constitutional type and may work with massage, diet, meditation, yoga and herbs to remedy imbalances.

“At first I wasn’t sure about seeing a Chinese Doctor. I didn’t know anything about Chinese medicine and I didn’t think I wanted to know! But now it’s been such a success I recommend it to all my friends.”

CHIROPRACTIC

Chiropractic is the manipulation (manual treatment) of the joints and muscles of the body and, in particular, of the spinal column. Treatment involves massage of the lower back muscles, and gentle stretching and mobilisation of the joints.

All body structures, including organs and blood vessels, have a nerve supply. The spinal column houses and protects the spinal cord from which all the body’s nerves radiate. Interference to the normal function of the vertebral column can, and often does, cause irritation of the associated nerves and in turn the body structures and organs that those nerves supply.

It is important in chiropractic treatment that a definite diagnosis of endometriosis has been made. This is because lower back problems can be responsible for worsening the symptoms. The assessment and correction of back function can play a role in lessening the severity of symptoms.

Once you have had a chiropractic treatment, you can do exercises for the lower back that will maintain the improvements to your back and joints. There are some suggestions in Self-help, page 8.

MASSAGE

Massage may be used to relieve pain, for relaxation, and even to encourage cleansing in certain tissues. It can be combined with other natural therapies and may be part of the approach offered by your naturopath. You may also see a specialist masseuse in addition to the naturopath. There are many different kinds of massage, including Shiatsu (a type of massage in which pressure is applied to the same points of the body as acupuncture, also called acupressure), reflexology (massage of the soles of the feet) or relaxation. The Australian Association of Massage Therapists can give you more information about the different kinds of massage and may be able to refer you to an appropriate masseuse. Refer Referrals, page 8.
Yoga is commonly equated with a system of stretching and relaxation exercises. What is less widely understood, however, is that its practices can be applied therapeutically to treat a range of ailments. Menstrual symptoms such as bloating, pain, heavy bleeding and other symptoms can be effectively managed by following simple exercises and breathing techniques.

For many women with endometriosis, menstrual symptoms make their experience of menstruation extremely debilitating. By learning methods that can greatly relieve the symptoms you can develop a more positive relationship with your physical self and feel better and better. The stress and tension surrounding the physical complaints can diminish and further aid the process of your recovery.

For therapeutic purposes yoga instruction is ideally given individually. If exercises are not adapted to suit you and your condition they may aggravate rather than ease your symptoms. It is therefore best to choose a teacher experienced in therapeutic work who can tailor an individual practice to suit your needs.

CHOOSING A NATURAL THERAPIST

One of the better ways to find an appropriate natural therapist is to ask around. Other women will often be able to tell you about a therapist who has treated them or who they know of. There are also women’s information services (such as those listed in Referrals, page 12) that can help to direct you to therapists who specialise in the treatment of women’s health problems or in the treatment of endometriosis specifically.

When you find a natural therapist you can ring them and ask a few questions before making an appointment. You can ask them about their training and their experience of treating your particular condition. Ask them what types of methods they use, how long an appointment will take and what kind of success they have in treating this condition.

It is also useful to ask how much it will cost to consult them, as Medicare does not cover natural therapies. Natural therapists may charge between $35 and $75 for a consultation (1999 charges). Often the first consultation may be much longer than subsequent consultations and may therefore cost more. In addition you may need to ask if there are any additional costs for herbal remedies or medicines. Medicines may cost between $20 and $50 for a month. It may also be useful to know if any health insurance companies offer rebates for this particular type of service (many do).

If you decide to make an appointment with the therapist, it is useful to have a clear idea about your concerns and questions (a list is a great idea) and you may even want a friend to come with you. It is important that you feel comfortable with the therapist and that you trust them so that you can talk comfortably about all aspects of your condition.

"Going to my therapist is one of the highlights of my week; I know that when I leave I will feel clearer, stronger and healthier.”

Seeing a natural therapist is likely to be a long-term commitment; your therapist may want to see you monthly (or perhaps fortnightly at first) for three to nine months, depending on the severity of your condition. You can ask the therapist just how long they expect the process to take and what signs of improvement they consider significant.
Above all, be sure that you are comfortable about the course of treatment they are outlining to you and about your ongoing relationship with them. These are important factors for successful treatment. Good communication can ensure that you find out what you need to know and can talk with your therapist about any problems or concerns you may have.

It is also important to let your therapist know what investigations have been conducted so far and the results of any tests you have had. If you have a doctor or a gynaecologist who is also treating you, you can let the therapist know who it is so that they can communicate their course of treatment to your other health care providers if you wish. It is often possible to use orthodox medicine and natural therapies in conjunction with one another. It can be an advantage if everyone in your health care team knows what is going on.

**SELF-HELP**

There are many lifestyle and dietary changes that may greatly improve you sense of well-being and reduce your symptoms. Self-help is a worthwhile alternative if it is not possible for you to see a natural therapist due to the cost of because none are available where you live, for example.

If you can see a natural therapist, they can support and encourage you in these processes, offer advice and also help you to unravel the complexities of your situation. Whatever advice you are given can be questioned and modified to suit you.

If you use any of these recommendations and they seem to have no noticeable benefit for you in six to eight weeks, discontinue them or consult a natural therapist if possible about their appropriateness.

**DIET**

Diet can make a lot of difference to your general level of health. Many natural therapists suggest a diet that is rich in whole grains, vegetables, nuts and seeds, and fish in preference to one based on animal products (meat, dairy foods), refined carbohydrates (pastries, white flour, sugar), and stimulants (tea, coffee, alcohol).

Specific dietary suggestions that are often prescribed for women with endometriosis are listed here. Supermarkets, chemists and health food shops stock these items.

**Vitamin B**
Take a daily vitamin B complex that includes vitamin B6. If premenstrual fluid retention and abdominal bloating is severe, extra vitamin B6 may be taken for the ten days preceding your menstrual period; 25mg to 50mg of B6 is useful amount to take daily.

**Zinc**
Increase your zinc intake either through zinc rich foods such as mushrooms, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, green beans and crustaceans, or by taking 20mg to 50mg of zinc daily.

**Calcium**
Increase your calcium intake, especially in the ten days before your period. This may be done by drinking calcium rich herbal teas such as chamomile, oatstraw, nettle or red clover, or by taking a calcium supplement such as calcium phosphate or calcium orotate (approximately 1000mg daily).
Essential fatty acids
Increase your dietary intake of essential fatty acids; this can be accomplished by decreasing the amount of animal fats in the diet (meat and chicken, dairy foods) and balancing this by increasing the intake of deep sea fish (including salmon, tuna and sardines) to two or three meals per week. Essential fatty acids can also be supplemented by taking Cod Liver Oil (10,000 to 20,000IU: International Units), cold pressed linseed oil (15mls daily) or evening primrose oil (six to eight capsules daily - an expensive although effective alternative). This tends to reduce certain inflammatory processes associated with endometriosis.

HERBS

Herbs can be used in a variety of different ways in the treatment of endometriosis. Some herbs aid the healing of internal scar tissue or are useful in other ways for the reproductive cycle. There are many gently acting herbs that can be safely and effectively incorporated into your diet. These include dandelion root, red clover flower, chamomile, nettle, oatstraw, raspberry leaf and verbena. All of these herbs have slow, gentle cleansing and restorative properties. For best results they should all be taken on a daily basis - two to three cups of herbal tea a day of any one of these herbs is sufficient to achieve a therapeutic action (infuse one teaspoon of the herb in a cup of hot water). They are suitable for long-term use and their effects should be felt after four to six weeks of regular use. It is a good idea to alternate herbal teas from time to time, as the body tends to become less responsive to anything that is used constantly.

You can also use herbs in baths (make a bag of the dried herb and put in the bath or use herbal/essential oils) or as creams (available from the health food shop or your therapist).

EXERCISE

Exercise can be an invaluable aid to improving your general health and sense of well-being. Exercise improves the circulation, increases oxygen to the blood and helps to improve flexibility to your joints and muscles. All of these will assist in relieving your symptoms. In addition, specific exercises for the lower back and pelvis may ease your pain. About 20 to 30 minutes of exercise three to four times a week is suggested. It’s important to find a type of exercise that you enjoy and can make part of your life. It is not necessary to go to an expensive gym or take classes. Walking instead of driving or taking the stairs instead of elevator can all contribute to your general well being.

General exercise
• graded walking: building from gentle to strenuous
• swimming: freestyle and backstroke particularly to stretch the abdominal muscles, rather than breast stroke which tones the lower back (according to Chinese medicine, endometriosis can be aggravated by cold, damp conditions and swimming may not be advisable while menstruating)
• belly-dancing: particularly useful for loosening and relaxing the pelvic muscles, as well as psychological loosening off
• cycling: gradually increasing distance and speed

MIND, BODY AND EMOTIONS

You may find that your symptoms are more severe when you are under stress. There are many things that may be stressful - poor nutrition and fatigue; overwork and emotional distress. Women are particularly susceptible to stress in our society as they are frequently responsible for not only paid work but also the
unpaid work of family, home and social lives. When this is combined with lack of choices and a feeling of powerlessness, stress can be a major factor in the progress of any health condition.

There are many short courses and self-help books outlining methods for dealing with stress. Relaxation, on page 11, also has some tips. For some people this may be sufficient. In many instances, however, it is very helpful to consult a trained counsellor or therapist (for example, a psychiatrist or psychologist) who can help you to identify stress-producing patterns and develop strategies to counteract them.

In addition to specific techniques of stress and pain management, a counsellor or therapist can help you to deal with feelings such as anger or self-blame associated with your physical symptoms. These feelings are common reactions to health problems but they can aggravate matters by lowering self-esteem and increasing anxiety. A therapist can provide a secure place for you to air your concerns.

As counsellors tend to specialise in particular fields you may want to choose a therapist who is experienced in dealing with women's health issues. Refer Referrals, page 12, for information services that can help you find an appropriate therapist.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups are a way of sharing your experiences and gaining support, advice and information from others in your situation. The Endometriosis Association of Victoria has a telephone information and support line and support groups run in different areas throughout Australia. There are also support groups for women who are having difficulties conceiving. Refer Referrals, page 12.

SEX

You may experience pain when you have penetrative sex because of your endometriosis. Particular positions may be painful, and you may also have dryness in your vagina. The pain can be caused by scarring or can come from tension. In addition to the physical discomfort, pain during sex can cause emotional distress, including difficulties with your sexual partner.

A self-help group may be a safe place for you to voice your concerns or you may wish to talk to a counsellor or therapist who has experience in sexual issues. A therapist could also suggest techniques such as relaxation, massage and communication that could facilitate better physical relationships; or they may have practical suggestions about better sexual positions, lubrication and alternative sexual practices.

RELAXATION

Pain makes you tense - and being tense worsens pain. Learning how to relax can be a powerful tool in your ability to control pain and in coming to terms with your endometriosis. Try some deep breathing exercises, relaxing baths and herb teas, or taking some time out in your day to do something for yourself. A good way to start learning how to relax may be to join a class or buy some relaxation tapes. Women's Health on Tape: Stress is an audio tape that includes a relaxation exercise and it is available from Women's Health Victoria.

Here is a relaxation exercise that you can use:

Sit or lie somewhere quiet and comfortable. Make sure that you will not be interrupted. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Working upwards from your feet, think about each part of your body. If a part of your body feels tense, breathe deeply to that part and think about letting go of the tension - or focus on sending it warmth or a relaxing colour. When you have relaxed every part of your body, picture yourself
in a lovely place, perhaps by the sea or a river. Picture the detail of the place and allow yourself to relax into your surroundings for 10 to 15 minutes. Practice this exercise every day and especially when you are in pain.

REFERRALS

- **Women’s Health Victoria** has a range of pamphlets available on Endometriosis and other women’s health issues. Telephone (03) 9662 3755. The service also has a Health Information Line: (03) 9662 3742 or Free Call 1800 133 321

- **Endometriosis Association of Victoria**
  Phone: (03) 9870 0536

- **Local women’s health centres or community health centres**
  (Look under ‘W’ and ‘C’ in the white pages.)

- **Australian Natural Therapists Association Ltd**
  Phone: Free Call 1800 817 577

- **National Herbalists Association of Australia**
  Phone: (02) 211 6437

- **Victorian Herbalists Association**
  Phone: 014 2868 46

- **The Association of Massage Therapists Australia**
  Phone: (03) 9510 3930

- **The Endometriosis Support Group**
  C/- Loddon Campaspe Women’s Health Centre
  31 MacKenzie Street, Bendigo, 3550
  Phone: 0354 43 0233

- **Assunta Hunter**
  The Women’s Clinic on Richmond Hill
  Phone: (03) 9427 0399

- **Women’s Information and Referral Exchange (WIRE)**
  Phone: 1 300 134 130
FURTHER READING

ENDOMETRIOSIS

• Various pamphlets produced by Endometriosis Association available through Women’s Health Victoria. Phone (03) 9662 3742
• Explaining Endometriosis by Lorraine Henderson, Robyn Riley and Ros Wood (Allen and Unwin, Melbourne, 1992)
• Coping with Endometriosis (3rd Edition) by Dr L Breitkopf and M Bakoulis, Prentice Hall Press, 1994
• Understanding Endometriosis by Caroline Hawkridge published by Macdonald Optima, London, 1989

GENERAL HEALTH

• The Penguin Guide to Women’s Health by Dr Frances MacKenzie, Viking, Ringwood, Victoria, 1994
• Well-Being for Women by Helen Lawrence, Lothian Publishing, Melbourne, 1990
• Below the Belt: An Owner’s Guide to Gynaecology by Dr Jane Macquarie, Text Publishing, Port Melbourne, 1994
• The Body of Knowledge by Jennifer Grimwade, Willlim Heinemann, Melbourne, 1995

COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE AND WOMEN

• Women’s Health in Women’s Hands by Deborah Cooper, Random House, Milsons Point, Sydney, 1995
• Nutrition for Women by Elizabeth Somer: Bookman, Melbourne, 1993
• Natural Therapies by Margot McCarthy, Thorsons, London, 1994
• Women’s Trouble by Kaz Cooke and Ruth Trickey, Allen and Unwin, Melbourne, 1998

HERBAL MEDICINE AND WOMEN

• Women Hormones and the Menstrual Cycle by Ruth Trickey, Allen and Unwin, Melbourne, 1998
• The Complete Women’s Herbal by Anne McIntrye, Hodder Headline, Rydalmere, NSW, 1994
• Herbal Healing for Women by Rosemary Gladstar, Bantam Books, Sydney, 1994

INFERTILITY AND WOMEN

• Infertility - Women Speak About their Experiences by Renate Klein, Pandora, London, 1989
• Natural Fertility by Francesca Naish, Sally Milner Publishing, 1991
• Preparation for Pregnancy by Suzanne Bradley, Argyll Publishing, 1995