

A SUPPLEMENT TO
alternative
medicine

▶ ADHD SOLUTIONS: ALTERNATIVES TO RITALIN

natural

SOLUTIONS FOR COMMON HEALTH CONCERNS

GET HEALTHY!

ARTHRITIS

> **lower** your toxic load for **pain-free joints**

HEART DISEASE

> **12** ways to **balance** your **cholesterol**

PROSTATE

> **9** herbs to **tame** your **growing problem**

Aging Skin

> **Botox** alternatives that really work

PLUS

10 DIETARY CHOICES THAT DEFEAT DIABETES

ADIOS PAIN!

A **Yoga fix** for carpal tunnel

Fall 2006

WWW.NATURALSOLUTIONSMAG.COM
ON SALE THROUGH DECEMBER 12

Bringing An End to Endometriosis

Dietary changes, Chinese herbs, and stress reduction can relieve this painful condition. BY EINAV KEET

Imagine two women. One has irregular periods, debilitating menstrual pain, and can't seem to get pregnant. The other has normal cycles with little cramping and has conceived with ease, although she suffers from irritable bowel syndrome and painful intercourse. These women may have different symptoms, but their doctors have given them the same diagnosis: Each has endometriosis.

The Endometriosis Association estimates that nearly 6 million American women have this condition, in which the tissue that lines the uterus, or the endometrium, spreads to other parts of the pelvis, where it forms lesions. Bad enough, you say, but like the uterine lining itself, these lesions swell up each month, often causing all the pain of horrible menstrual cramps, but with no way for the body to relieve them. Such growths occur most commonly on the ovaries, in the fallopian tubes, and near the rectum. In rare cases, endometrial tissue has found its way to the lungs, limbs, and other areas relatively remote to the womb. "It's really important that we understand how multifaceted this disease is," says Christiane Northrup, MD, author of *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*, adding that endometriosis "isn't even the same disease in two different people."

Identifying Causes

Heredity, that old reliable link, plays a role in the onset of endometriosis, but researchers have now zeroed in on many more of the factors governing the condi-

tion. Retrograde flow, the reverse flow of menstrual blood, has for many years received much of the blame, but this occurs in 90 percent of all women, and only a small percentage of them develop endometrial lesions. Among the other explanations proffered: Modern American women, most of whom work, have fewer children and more periods in their lifetimes, and that's led some to label endometriosis the "working woman's disease." That's a quaint notion that the medical community has all but shot down.

"Where the pay dirt is for my way of thinking is that endometriosis is actually an immune system disorder," says Northrup. This falls into step with research showing an increase in the number and size of lesions in those with immune deficiencies. So maybe there is a link to our careers after all, as stress and decreased immunity go hand in hand—and our job strains rank among the worst. Adding to the impact of stress, the extra cortisol and norepinephrine our adrenal glands produce under all that pressure can actually inhibit the body's breakdown of estrogen, thus setting off an endometriosis flare-up. We need the normal levels of these hormones our bodies produce to get through the day, but most of us suffer from overload as we live in a near constant state of fight-or-flight syndrome.



Doctors remain perplexed by the myriad symptoms of endometriosis.

We also happen to live in virtual soup of estrogen. "Everything about our culture right now pushes women towards estrogen dominance," Northrup says, noting that some of the chemicals in plastics and detergents can act like the hormone once they enter our bodies.

Over the years, doctors treating women with endometriosis have remained perplexed by the seemingly myriad symptoms and the wide array of possible causes that characterize the condition. For a sure diagnosis, many have come to rely on the tiny lenses used in pelvic laparoscopy, although a less dependable ultrasound can provide enough evidence in some cases. A positive diagnosis needn't sentence a woman to a lifetime of pain. Nor does treatment necessitate taking hormones or the

more drastic step of having to get a hysterectomy. Instead, a handful of natural, holistic approaches could spell the end of endo.

Diet Plays a Role

Let's first talk about what we can take off our shelves for the sake of endometriosis relief. Experts say we should focus on reducing our levels of "bad" prostaglandins and increasing the "good" kind. We get these fatty acids through diet and from what our bodies naturally produce. The beneficial prostaglandins can work wonders to decrease inflammation of endometrial tissue, but the harmful ones can bring on the cramps. "Any kind of food that's been hormonally treated, everyone should stay away from, but especially people who have endometriosis," says licensed acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist Robin Schiesser from her Boulder, Colorado, office. She notes that hormones in the meat and dairy we eat can exacerbate endometrial

tissue. Likewise, high glycemic index foods such as white bread can raise blood sugar and insulin levels, thus increasing cortisol, a stress hormone associated with endo flare-ups.

On the flip side, foods that boost good prostaglandins can improve symptoms. "When you increase omega-3 fats in your diet through flax seed, macadamia nuts, wild Alaskan salmon, anything that raises omega-3 fats," says Northrup, "that will impact the cascade of metabolic events leading to estrogen dominance and it will interrupt the inflammatory chemical cycle." She recommends her patients get 1,000 to 5,000 mgs or more of omega-3 per day. Schiesser recommends a diet that includes spirulina as well as cold-pressed oils such as flax, pumpkin seed, black currant, linseed, Evening Primrose, borage, and grape seed. She also stresses the importance of getting your B vitamins, which help the liver metabolize excess estrogen.

For those willing to experiment some



more with their diets, Northrup suggests eliminating dairy products. "I can't tell you the number of people that I have seen whose pain just stopped when they stopped dairy food," she says, adding that she hasn't seen uniform results among her patients, and that no formal scientific studies have tested whether this tactic actually works or not. "I've seen it enough that it's worth just stopping dairy for two

continued on p.92

TONGARO

The BEST Shampoo...



...In A Nutshell.

INTRODUCING!

Nature's
Big Gun!
SHAMPOO

FROM
YOUR
CROWN
AND
GLORY
FOR THINNING HAIR

Natural Walnut Shell Exfoliating Shampoo
Treatment For Thinning Hair

50% of Men and Women Experience
Hair Loss and Need A Natural Solution

FIRST OF IT'S KIND!

This Revolutionary, Finely Ground Walnut Shell Scalp Exfoliator
Cleans & Nourishes Hair, Follicles, and Releases Trapped Hair.



Ask for Your Crown and Glory at your
local natural food store or call

1-800-989-1517

Also available for purchase online.

YOUR
CROWN & GLORY
FOR THINNING HAIR

Serving the Natural Foods Industry Since 1995

www.yourcrownandglory.com

continued from p.84

weeks," she says, "and then adding it back and seeing what happens."

The Chinese Approach

The rising popularity of Eastern treatments for endometriosis also stems from experiential evidence. "A lot of people that I see have tried everything else and nothing works, so they come to me kind of as a last resort," says JoHannah Reilly, a Boulder naturopath and acupuncturist. She approaches endometriosis as a condition of stagnation of both the blood and the qi, or life force. Working in the same practice, Reilly and Schiesser are careful to note that they examine each patient to determine her individual medical needs, but that those often fall into one of many archetypes. "Unfortunately, it's not a one-size-fits-all," says Schiesser, explaining how she determines a regimen of prescribed herbs. "There are classic formulas for each of the different types, but then each person might have it tailored to her because she has a slightly different pattern combined with it.

"It's really important to get the right formula for the right person."

An herbal formula can contain as many as 15 different herbs including Tao Ren or peach kernel (*Semen persicae*) to break up blood stasis, Bai Shao or peony root (*Radix paeoniae lactiflorae*) to move and nourish the blood, and Hong Hua or safflower flower (*Flos Carthamus*), which can alleviate pain. Before you grab these at the store, though, Reilly and Schiesser caution against self-prescribing, as the wrong formula likely won't do any good. "Each person is a puzzle," says Schiesser, "and it is a challenge and it's rewarding to figure out how to solve the puzzle."

No one, alas, has found a cure for endometriosis, although doctors have fine-tuned surgical methods to remove lesions while keeping the reproductive organs intact. By making a few life adjustments, though, women just might sidestep any surgery. "Different things work for different people," says Northrup, "but for motivated people who are willing to look at every aspect—diet, emotions, lifestyle—I think you're looking at an 80 percent success rate."