

Naturopathy explained by Katherine Thomas - Naturopath

A naturopath is a practitioner which uses medicines derived from nature to achieve a state of wellness. When you come to see a naturopath they will assess your total state of health by looking at various body systems to see how your health issues are impacting on your body.

During your naturopathic consultation you will be questioned extensively on all areas of your health. Diagnostic tools such as iridology, tongue and nail analysis may also be used by your naturopath to better assess your state of health. This allows your naturopath to decide the best plan of action for you, and an individual treatment plan will be developed based on this. Your naturopath may also request that you do some blood tests to assess progress of treatment.

Treatments used are different for every person and often include herbal medicines in liquid or tablet form, nutritional supplements, flower essences and detailed dietary planning.

When choosing a Naturopath, be sure to check that they have an advanced diploma of naturopathy and above to ensure you are getting the best level of care.

Treatment of endometriosis with naturopathy is useful as your naturopath can individualise a treatment plan specific to your case. It can be difficult to make the right dietary choices for you and this is where the help of an experienced naturopath can really come in handy.

The treatment time frame for endometriosis is very variable due to your individual constitution (ability to heal yourself), severity of your disease and whether or not other factors are playing a role. After your initial consultation, your naturopath should be able to give you an indication of how long you may need to be on treatment to resolve your health condition.

Endometriosis – Naturopathic Treatment

Treatment of endometriosis by a naturopath or herbalist addresses factors which have been found to contribute to the disease processes of endometriosis. When you see a naturopath experienced with endometriosis treatment, the following will be taken into account when they develop your individual treatment plan:

- *Reducing Inflammation is a key aim in treatment as inflammation has been found to be a contributing factor in the development of endometriosis as well as the disease process causing inflammation, which leads to tissue damage and pain.*
- *Women with endometriosis have abnormally high oestrogen levels. Reducing oestrogen levels is therefore essential in treatment for most women as high oestrogen is said to be the driving force behind abnormal endometrial growth.*

- *Modulating the immune system is also important in treatment as a properly functioning immune system should recognise the endometrial growths as foreign and assist in removing them. By supporting your immune system function we can assist the immune system in cleaning up foreign endometrial tissue.*
- *Retrograde menstruation (the back flow of menstrual tissue and blood into the pelvic cavity) is thought to be associated with the beginnings of endometrial growths. Assisting with a healthy, flowing menstruation is therefore key to reduce the incidence of this back flow.*
- *Poor elimination of hormones and toxins via the liver, kidneys and bowel can lead to excess hormones and xenoestrogens in the body. Assisting these pathways of elimination is important in the treatment of endometriosis to normalise hormone levels and reduce oxidative damage which can reduce inflammation.*
- *A naturopath will also address the immediate symptoms which you experience due to endometriosis. Herbs and nutrients which reduce pain, normalise menstrual flow, regulate your menstrual cycle and assist in healthy bowel movements may be used in treatment to improve your quality of life.*
- *Pregnancy is very often associated with resolution of endometriosis. If you decide that you are ready to start a family or are wishing to conceive, then your naturopath can help you to improve your chances of achieving and maintaining pregnancy with the use of herbs and nutrients which support healthy reproductive function.*

In summary, a naturopathic treatment plan would aim to:

- Reduce inflammation
- Modulate the immune system
- Reduce excessive hormone levels
- Support healthy reproductive function
- Reduce pain and other associated symptoms
- Assist in achieving pregnancy if desired
- Educate the patient on preventative measures to prevent recurrence

Diet and Lifestyle

There are several dietary factors which have been associated with endometriosis development. There are a few key areas that you can address in your diet to improve your chances of a successful treatment:

Avoid red meat and ham

Recent studies have found that red meat and ham intake are associated with the risk of endometriosis developing, so you should try and reduce your intake as much as possible. As red meat is a source of protein and iron, you will need to ensure that you are adding in more green leafy vegetables, sunflower seeds, apricots and legumes to increase your dietary iron and protein.

Avoid conventional chicken, pork and farmed fish

Non-organic chicken and pork is high in hormones and antibiotics so should therefore be avoided. Farmed fish are detrimental as they have a poor fat balance and are also given antibiotics and are sometimes even injected with dye to give them a red hue (farmed salmon is actually grey). Stick to organic free range meats and ocean caught medium size deep sea fish such as mackerel, blue eyed cod, tuna and snapper.

Avoid dairy

Dairy is a food which is very inflammatory in nature, so can increase the amount of inflammation occurring in the body. It is especially important for those which have an intolerance to or do not digest dairy very well to avoid this food. This means cutting back on the milk, cheese, cream and ice-cream. Try using rice or oat milk as an alternative.

Avoid sugar

As well as being another inflammatory food, sugar and refined grains suppress the immune system. Avoiding sugar and refined grain products such as white bread, pasta and biscuits, will therefore benefit the immune system.

Eat more yellow and cruciferous vegetables

Studies show that women who consume a diet high in yellow and cruciferous vegetables have a lower risk of developing endometriosis than those who do not. Cruciferous vegetables assist in the clearance of excess oestrogen from the body, and include cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, brussell sprouts, spinach, kale, rocket, watercress and daikons.

Eat more fresh fruit and green vegetables

Another study found that fresh fruit and green vegetables are protective against endometriosis. Eat more spinach, cabbage, zucchini, rocket, berries, mangoes, kiwifruit, pineapple and apples.

Follow an antiinflammatory (alkaline) diet

Foods which are alkaline to the body reduce inflammation while foods which are acidic in nature cause inflammation. It is therefore best to have a diet which is comprised mostly of alkaline foods. As a general rule, alkaline foods include most fruits and vegetables, buckwheat, millet, quinoa, amaranth, almonds and greens such as barley and wheat grass. Foods which are acidic in nature are meat, chicken, dairy, sugar, all other grains, some nuts and seeds.

Eat lots of fibre

Fibre has an important role in the body as it helps to bind excess hormones and toxins for removal through the bowel. High fibre foods include fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, whole grains and sprouts.

Make legumes a staple part of your diet

Legumes are a great source of protein and fibre and include chickpeas, lentils, cannellini beans, fava beans, azuki beans, mung beans, soy beans and black-eyed beans. Protein is essential for repair in the body and you will need to get your protein from vegetable sources if you reduce red meat in the diet. Legumes are also phytoestrogens, which means they exert weak oestrogen like effects in the body which has a regulatory effect on oestrogen levels, balancing hormones.

Whole food is best

A diet based on whole food is the best way to achieve health. This may take a bit of getting used to, as a whole food diet is based on foods which are not altered or processed. A whole food diet is based on whole grains, fruit, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, fresh ocean caught fish and organic meats and eggs. A diet like this can require some cooking skills, and your naturopath will be able to teach you the best way to integrate these foods into your diet.

Keep your water intake up

Water is important for many bodily processes including detoxification and transport of nutrients to tissues. Dehydration leads to constipation and reduced kidney output, which causes higher levels of hormones and toxins to accumulate in the body. Aim for 2 litres of filtered or better still spring water daily, more if exercising or on a hot day.

Exercise regularly

Exercise helps to decrease inflammation and oxidative damage in the body as well as speeding up the clearance of toxins. Aim for at least 40 minutes 3 times a week. A mix of cardio (running, riding bike, swimming) and resistance exercise (weights, push ups, sit ups etc) is the best combination to achieve the most benefit.

About Oestrogens

Oestrogen

- Oestrogen is a sex hormone which has roles in regulating the menstrual cycle but also is needed for the growth of endometrial tissue
- Women with endometriosis have abnormally high levels of oestrogen
- This is thought to be the driving force behind endometrial tissue growth
- Reducing oestrogen is therefore a key aim in the naturopathic treatment of endometriosis
- This is done with the use of oestrogen modulating herbs
- Herbs and nutrients which increase the liver clearance of oestrogen are also used

Xenoestrogens

- Xenoestrogens are substances in our environment that exert negative oestrogen like effects in the body
- The oestrogenic effect tends to be stronger than natural oestrogens
- Xenoestrogens are also harder to eliminate than other oestrogens
- It is important for women with endometriosis to avoid xenoestrogens as much as possible

Xenoestrogens are found in:

- Food contaminants such as pesticides and herbicides
- Plastics such as cling film and containers
- Pollutants such as car fumes and industrial waste
- Plastic + Microwave = xenoestrogen release
- Re-used plastic bottles leach toxins into water

How can you avoid xenoestrogens?

- Go organic. Eating organic food is an easy way to avoid xenoestrogens due to the use of pesticides and hormones in foods. This is particularly important for meat and eggs which often can contain synthetic hormones as well
- Avoiding using cling film directly on food and especially in the microwave, where other plastics should not be used either
- Avoid being exposed to areas of heavy pollution- walking amongst traffic can often be counter productive
- If you live in a farming area be careful not to be around when pesticides and synthetic fertilisers are being spread

Phytoestrogens

- Phytoestrogens are natural compounds which bind to oestrogen receptors in the body
- They exert weak oestrogen like effects and help to regulate oestrogen levels
- Daily incorporation of phytoestrogens to the diet may help to regulate hormone levels

Phytoestrogenic foods include

- Legumes – lentils, chickpeas and beans (soy, kidney, cannellini, navy, black eyed, adzuki)
- Flaxseed/Linseed- cold pressed flaxseed oil, freshly ground flaxseeds
- Fermented soy products – tamari, tofu, tempeh, miso, Bonsoy milk

Therapeutic foods to reduce oestrogen

- Cruciferous vegetables increase liver clearance of oestrogens – broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, spinach, rocket, watercress, kale
- Fibre – fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds and whole grains
- Lemon juice – increases metabolism, activates the liver
- Beetroot & bitter greens (rocket, watercress, dandelion greens) support liver function
- Exercise increases metabolism and the clearance of hormones
- Drink at least 2 litres of filtered water daily to assist clearance