

## Herbal treatment of Endometriosis

Advice from [mothernature.com](http://mothernature.com) of using herbal treatments to reduce they symptoms of endometriosis.

Medical science offers us many theories about the cause, but no cure for this poorly understood disorder. Often, the recommended treatment for endometriosis is quite drastic—either a hysterectomy or hormone therapy with a drug such as danazol, which suppresses estrogen and initiates a false menopause—complete with hot flashes, vaginal dryness and a decreased sexual drive. Understandably, many women are reluctant to take this drug.

Thankfully, many cases of endometriosis can be treated with herbs, but you must be patient—most of the women I know who chose to treat this disorder herbally found that successful treatment took many months. For best results, work with a natural health care professional who has experience with this disorder and can help you develop a complete healing campaign that includes dietary changes, massage and possibly acupuncture.

Since an overabundance of estrogen is one contributing factor of endometriosis, vitex berries, which balance a woman's hormones, are a valuable herb in any endometriosis formula. When I discuss the treatment of this disorder with other herbalists, they always say that vitex is the most important herb in their formulas.

And since hormones are a major factor in the development of this disorder, it is generally a good idea to also treat your liver with herbs, particularly burdock. Remember, the liver helps clear estrogen from the body.

If you suffer from endometriosis, it is also important for you to reduce the bleeding, inflammation, muscle cramps and pain that generally accompany this disorder. The first herbs that I turn to for easing these symptoms are cramp bark and wild yam. For herbs to stop cramping and other menstrual pain—evening primrose oil and ginger. Red raspberry reduces bleeding and is thought to strengthen the uterus—herbalists and midwives have been using it for these purposes for at least a thousand years.

Horsetail also reduces excessive bleeding, especially menstrual bleeding. And it may do more than that for women with endometriosis—herbalists believe that it keeps scar tissue flexible, thus preventing further scarring. During the tuberculosis outbreaks of the early twentieth century, horsetail was used to reduce the amount of scarring on people's lungs. Pills containing horsetail are commonly sold to strengthen nails and hair, and may also strengthen connective ligaments such as those that hold the uterus in place.

Medical science is now realizing that endometriosis is a signal that you need to build up your immune system. Taking echinacea is a good way to do this because this herb not only improves immunity, but also helps repair connective tissues and fibres.

Castor oil packs are also very helpful in treating endometriosis. No one can explain exactly how they work, but experience has shown me time and again that they often make the difference between the success of a natural treatment and its failure. A recent study from Washington University in Washington, D.C., showed that castor oil packs can improve the function of the immune system in the pelvic area.

Any woman with endometriosis can tell you that the disorder can make life very difficult, but I felt particularly sorry for my friend Cathy. She performs and teaches Middle Eastern dance—probably one of the hardest things in the world to do when suffering from endometriosis. In the middle of one performance, the pain became so bad that she

barely finished the show. She made an appointment to see her gynecologist the next day.

The minute her doctor suggested that she take hormonal drugs, she hesitated. Nevertheless, she figured that taking them would be better than having a hysterectomy. Cathy is also a registered nurse, and one of her jobs when she worked in a gynecology clinic was to check in patients who were to undergo hysterectomies. She learned that almost every woman she admitted was there because of painful menstruation, often from endometriosis.

Cathy started having problems with her medication from day one— she was suffering every side effect in the book—and her gynecologist kept switching her from one drug to another. Finally, Cathy became fed up with the drugs and started reading up on herbal alternatives. She had been studying herbs for years, but to her dismay had discovered very little information about endometriosis. Piecing together what she did find, she made a customised formula. The primary herbs she chose were echinacea, vitex, wild yam, red raspberry, motherwort and nettles, with burdock and milk thistle added for her liver. All the while, she kept searching for more information.

Figuring that it was going to take a lot to solve her problem, she tried castor oil packs and hot and cold sitz baths with a few drops of lavender or chamomile essential oil (in the hot bath only) to increase circulation in the pelvic area. Since her apartment did not have a bathtub, she used two large plastic tubs that she had bought at a hardware store. She really had me laughing as she described the looks that came across the faces of the other customers as they watched her sit in the tubs to find the right size.

She also noticed that stress and anything that lowered her immunity, such as not getting enough sleep or not eating well, made it much worse. Just one cup of coffee started the cramping again. It took lots of discipline, but Cathy managed to change her habits and improve her endometriosis dramatically. Now she is dancing again, with only a little twinge of pain when she eats or sleeps poorly or feels stressed.

Cathy describes her recovery using herbal treatments as "amazing." You can imagine her reaction when she heard her friend Judy complaining that endometriosis was preventing her from getting pregnant. Judy had been following her gynecologist's advice to a T for more than two years, but her condition was no better, possibly even a little worse. Cathy designed for Judy a formula that was similar to the one she herself had used, and gave Judy a list of lifestyle things to watch out for. Because Judy lives in another town, the two did not see each other for more than a year, but when they did, Judy gave her benefactor a huge hug—as best she could considering she was seven months pregnant!

#### Endometriosis Tea

1 teaspoon each vitex berries, echinacea root, wild yam rhizome and cramp bark

½ teaspoon each horsetail stalks, red raspberry and motherwort

1 quart water

Combine herbs and water in an uncovered pot and bring to a boil. Turn down the heat and let simmer gently for about 5 minutes. Remove from heat, cover and steep for 15 minutes. Strain out herbs. Drink at least 2 cups daily. This formula can also be taken as a tincture or in capsules.

#### Castor Oil Pack

¼ cup castor oil  
8 drops lavender essential oil  
Soft cloth

Combine castor oil and lavender essential oil. Soak cloth in this mixture, then fold it and place it in a baking dish in a 350°F oven for about 20 minutes—it should be quite warm, but not uncomfortably so. Place the folded cloth directly over the afflicted area and cover it with a towel to keep it warm. (A hot water bottle on top of this also works well.) Use the pack once a day for 30 to 60 minutes. Rinse off the oil after each application.

#### Sitz Bath

10 drops rosemary essential oil  
Add essential oil to a bathtub and stir well to distribute. Sit in tub with hot water up to your waist for 5 to 10 minutes (this is a good time to read a book). Then sit in a tub of cold water, also up to your waist, for at least 1 minute. (The large plastic tubs sold at hardware stores work fine.) Continue for 2 to 5 rounds. Perform this treatment every day, if possible. Lavender or chamomile essential oils could be used in place of rosemary. If you want, you can make a strong tea of these herbs and use that instead of the essential oils.

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