

## **EA/NIH study shows women with endometriosis at greater risk for several other diseases**

Europe's leading reproductive medicine journal, *Human Reproduction*, reported that based on a study done by the Endometriosis Association and the NIH, women with endometriosis are significantly more likely than other women to suffer from a number of serious conditions.

Endometriosis Association research beginning in 1980 showed links between endometriosis and allergies and other signs of immune dysfunctions, which spurred its members to push for further research to determine what other diseases are more common in those with endometriosis.

A research team from the Endometriosis Association in Milwaukee; the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Bethesda Maryland; and the School of Public Health and Health Services at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., carried out and analyzed a survey of 3,680 members of the Endometriosis Association who had endometriosis. They found that among these women:

- 20 percent had more than one other disease
- up to 31 percent of those with co-existing diseases had also been diagnosed with either fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome and some of these had other autoimmune or endocrine disease
- chronic fatigue syndrome was more than a hundred times more common than in the female U.S. population generally
- hypothyroidism was 7 times more common
- fibromyalgia was twice as common
- the autoimmune inflammatory diseases (systemic lupus erythematosus, Sjögren's Syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis) occurred more frequently
- allergic and atopic conditions such as asthma and eczema were higher. 61 percent of endometriosis sufferers had allergies compared to 18 percent of the U.S. general population, and 12 percent had asthma compared to 5 percent. If a woman had endometriosis plus an endocrine disease the figure for allergies rose to 72 percent and to 88 percent if she had endometriosis plus fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome.
- two-thirds reported that they had family members with diagnosed or suspected endometriosis, confirming research that suggested there is a familial tendency.

"These findings suggest a strong association between endometriosis and autoimmune disorders," said lead investigator Ninet Sinaii from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. "Health care professionals may need to consider these disorders when evaluating their patients for endometriosis." Ms. Sinaii stated, "Women with endometriosis frequently suffer from autoimmune inflammatory diseases, hypothyroidism, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, allergies, and asthma. It is evident that women with pelvic pain are not diagnosed as having endometriosis for many years, suggesting that physicians, especially those taking care of adolescents, should consider the diagnosis. These findings also suggest a strong association between endometriosis and autoimmune disorders and indicate the need to consider the co-existence of other conditions in women with endometriosis.

Mary Lou Ballweg, President of the Endometriosis Association and co-investigator of the study said, "It is gratifying that the bigger picture of endometriosis as a serious immune and endocrine disease is finally coming to light. From our earliest research we were aware of the immune dysfunction common in women with endometriosis and their families. These important findings should spur more research."

The Endometriosis Association is an international self-help nonprofit of women and girls with endometriosis and their families, physicians, scientists, and others interested in it. The Endometriosis Association has been headquartered in Milwaukee since it began in 1980 and now has members and groups in 66 countries. The Association provides support for those affected by endometriosis, and education about the disease.

It also maintains the world's largest research databases on endometriosis and supports related research around the world including the Association's flagship research program at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville, Tennessee. The Association's Open Research Fund has supported 20 research groups in six countries in the last two years.

For more information contact them at 1-800-992-3636 or [www.EndometriosisAssn.org](http://www.EndometriosisAssn.org)