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Heavy, painful periods could signal endometriosis

New Straits Times · 30 Apr 2025 · 9 · meera@nst.com.my By Meera Murugesan

FOR some women, their monthly periods are a time of extreme pain and discomfort. Unfortunately this is often normalised. Women come to accept that very heavy bleeding or severe cramps are part and parcel of being female.



Often, these could be signs of an underlying medical condition and endometriosis is one such disease.

It occurs when tissue similar to the uterine lining grows outside the womb, causing chronic pelvic pain, excessive menstrual bleeding and fertility issues.

Despite its aggressive and invasive nature, endometriosis remains misunderstood and underrecognised, often dismissed as “bad period pain”.

In reality, it can cause debilitating pain, fertility challenges and significant disruptions to overall wellbeing.

One of the biggest barriers to timely treatment is misdiagnosis. Symptoms often mimic other conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or urinary tract infections (UTIs), leading to unnecessary treatments that do not address the underlying cause.

“Early detection and education are key to improving outcomes, but many Malaysian women still believe that severe period pain is normal, which delays diagnosis and treatment,” explains Hospital Picaso consultant gynaecologist and advanced minimally invasive and robotic surgeon Dr Tan Ee Ping.

Regular gynaecological screening, including transvaginal ultrasounds and pelvic examinations, are crucial in detecting abnormalities before they escalate.

Early detection can significantly improve long-term outcomes and prevent unnecessary suffering, adds Dr Tan.

Fertility is a major concern, with nearly half of those with endometriosis experiencing infertility. The condition can cause inflammation, ovarian cysts (endometriomas) and scar tissue, making conception difficult.

Often, women only discover they have endometriosis when struggling to conceive, by which time the disease may have already caused irreversible damage, says Dr Tan.

Surgical advancements have played a crucial role in improving treatment outcomes for complex endometriosis cases.

While traditional surgery can be invasive and challenging, particularly when endometriosis affects the bowel, bladder or delicate ovarian tissue, these days, robotic surgery has transformed the field, providing precision, minimised trauma and faster recovery says Hospital Picaso endometriosis-focused specialist and advanced minimally invasive and robotic surgeon Dr

Sharifah Halimah Jaafar.

However, Dr Sharifah emphasises that surgery alone is not a cure.

“A holistic and comprehensive treatment plan is crucial to prevent recurrence and maintain quality of life,” she says.

This includes long-term hormonal therapy to suppress disease activity, lifestyle modifications such as diet and stress management and regular follow-ups.

One key challenge within Malaysia’s healthcare system is fragmented care. Many women see multiple doctors without a coordinated treatment plan, leading to delays, misdiagnoses and repeated surgeries that could have been avoided with a more structured approach.

Endometriosis is a public health concern, adds Dr Tan, and it requires greater awareness, better training for healthcare providers and stronger policy support for specialised care.

Women, on their part, need to take control of their health and recognise that severe period pain is not normal. Seeking medical help early can prevent complications.