



Understanding the Most Common Gyno Issues

Recognizing the symptoms and learning the treatments for some of the gynecological health risks women face

Written by Meagan Clanahan

Women face a wide variety of health concerns, and when it comes to needing to visit the gynecologist, many women simply try to put it off. *Katy Magazine* highlights the most common gynecological health issues and their symptoms.

Endometriosis

This potentially painful condition usually affects the lining of the pelvis, ovaries, or bowels. For most women, endometriosis is most uncomfortable during a woman's period, causing heavy bleeding, bloating, nausea, or pain during intercourse. It is often misdiagnosed or confused with other issues affecting the pelvic region such as irritable bowel syndrome. One of the biggest risks of endometriosis is infertility problems, as it can cause damage to the egg and sperm and obstruct implantation. While there are no magical cures for endometriosis, it can be managed through certain types of birth control, which prevent the buildup of extraneous tissue. Surgical options are also available from the conservative laparoscopic to destroy the extra lining or in the most severe cases, a full hysterectomy as a last resort.

Infertility

Perhaps the least talked about, but most common issue affecting women today is infertility, or the inability to get pregnant or maintain a pregnancy. Infertility has a broad spectrum of causes, varying from hormone levels, ovulation regularity, endometriosis, advanced age, fallopian tube damage, uterine abnormalities, and many more. Depending upon the age of the patient, most doctors recommend a full battery of tests after six to 12 months of intercourse without conception. Most often, the ObGyn will refer the couple to a reproductive endocrinologist who can further evaluate the causes of the infertility. Sometimes the fix may be as simple as adjusting hormone or thyroid levels or a low dose of fertility drugs to stimulate ovulation. If the problem is more complex or a cause for the infertility cannot be found, the doctor may recommend more invasive procedures such as artificial insemination or in vitro fertilization. Because infertility issues can take their toll both emotionally and physically, it's vitally important to have a strong support system and a doctor who you trust. With the myriad of options available today and ever-increasing success rates, infertility is a battle that can be overcome.

Ovarian Cysts

One of the most common causes of painful menstrual cycles, pelvic pain, or heavy bleeding can be attributed to ovarian cysts. "These cysts are benign, usually functional cysts, meaning that each month during the menstrual cycle, multiple follicles form on the ovaries. These cysts can become filled with blood or fluid, but some can enlarge," says Syndi Nobles, a P.A. with Fulshear Family Medicine. In order to diagnose

and evaluate the cyst for size and make up, doctors will typically order a pelvic or transvaginal ultrasound. Most of the time, the wait-and-see approach is employed, and the pain subsides over the course of a few months as the cyst dissolves. Nobles adds, "If a patient has a larger or more complex cyst that is seen on ultrasound, the patient might need to be followed with serial ultrasounds, or referral for surgical procedure." Women can prevent future cysts by birth control to suppress ovulation.

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

When women have multiple cysts on each ovary instead of just one larger functional cyst, most likely they have PCOS. This disorder is also characterized by acne, irregular ovulation, menstrual abnormalities, weight gain, and extra hair growth, although not every woman experiences all of those symptoms. While undiagnosed or untreated PCOS may eventually lead to a higher risk of Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, women can manage this syndrome through medications, birth control pills, and adherence to a healthy diet and exercise regimen. It's recommended to consult regularly with a specialist like an ObGyn or reproductive endocrinologist if you are in the child-bearing years and have difficulty conceiving.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the U.S., affecting 79 million sexually active women and men. Because it may not produce symptoms (such as genital warts) right away, HPV is easily passed from partner to partner. This disease is the leading cause of cervical cancer in women, prompting most Katy practitioners to urge all of their female patients to receive an HPV vaccine starting at age 9 in a three-shot, six-month cycle. Catch-up vaccinations are also available through 26 years of age if patients were not vaccinated as teenagers. Women can help decrease the risk of getting HPV by staying monogamous and getting the HPV vaccine, according to Dr. Selina Lin of Katy Women's Care. "By getting our routine pap smears, we can keep an eye on this," Dr. Lin says. There is no cure for HPV, but your doctor can treat genital warts caused by low-risk HPV and do proactive tests to catch the onset of cancer for high-risk HPV infections. **KM**



MEAGAN CLANAHAN is a Katy wife and mother of twin 4-year-olds. She is passionate about women's health, especially infertility issues.