

Am I normal? (Endometriosis – 1)



You start your journey in adolescence, when people tell you you're a woman, because you had your period for the first time. You feel the first menstrual cramps and everything is normal, until one day, you start complaining a little bit more, about the pain and the heavy bleeding that seems impossible to stop. "It's normal", says your general practitioner, and you accept it and move on. Years go by and the pain and discomfort at that time of the month get worse. You keep complaining to your GP, who transfers you to the family planning program, and again you hear people saying: "that's normal, it will go away as you get older", and you keep waiting for that to happen. You become an adult and the pain gets more and more intense. You look for a doctor, then another one, and yet another one... and the answer is still the same: "It's normal". At a certain point, you start thinking: "Am I normal? Is it all in my head?" and you get confused.

The pain is now so severe that you feel you are unable to study or work. You miss school, work, and social events. For 3 to 8 days a month, on average, you stay in bed, screaming and squirming with pain. You don't even know how to sit down or lie down, because all you feel is pain and sickness. You can't eat, sleep and going to the toilet is an absolute torture. Your family can't stand seeing you like that and wonders what is going on. Your friends don't understand you, because on the surface, you look "normal" and yet complain about a pain that no one has ever seen or heard from. Every one gives you advice: "you should go for a walk", "you should take painkillers", "don't think about it", "all women suffer from cramps", "it will all be over once you have a child".

Nobody understands that your legs have stopped obeying you, your body is in constant pain, you feel extremely tired all the time and all the thoughts that cross your mind are: "Am I normal? What's wrong with me?" And you start suffering in silence, because nobody else understands your pain.

You continue to see different doctors, looking for answers, and each one seems to have a different explanation. The pain, however, is still there, lingering. You get weaker and weaker, with kidney and bowel problems, and you start a treatment, then another one, and then another one... Despair? Yes, of course you feel desperate! The pain conditions your life. At work, your immediate superiors don't understand why you are not productive, why you are absent so many times. In the middle of all this chaos, your love life seems to be the only thing that comforts you, until the day you start feeling ashamed of your pain, because you cannot accompany

your boyfriend to social events, in simple walks, and when having sex becomes so painful that you start avoiding it. Your role as a woman, as a partner, is gradually undermined. Hopelessness starts setting in: it's pointless to think about having a normal life, without pain. Your life is now controlled and programmed by pain.

After 8, 10, 12 years of pain, suffering, confusion and loss, a doctor tells you that you suffer from Endometriosis and a new journey begins. The disease is now part of you. Doctors don't know its origin and it doesn't have a cure. They say it's chronic and the only thing they can do is to prescribe treatment that may relieve pain. But you still don't know all you have to go through. Uncertainty is the only certainty. Explaining your disease to others is not easy: they have never heard from it. The constant and invasive exams you are submitted to, the unpredictable results, the fear... Yes, the fear that the results may say you need another surgery, or that another part of your body has been affected, or that you may need to remove the uterus and God knows what else, the fear of being infertile, the fear, the fear... Always the fear, holding hands with pain.

You wonder whether you may be able to fulfill the dream of being a mother. You don't know. Is your role as a mother in jeopardy, just like your role as a woman?

Ceaseless pain, being subject to a series of medical procedures, affected organs, related diseases, broken relationships, lack of understanding, unfulfilled dreams... that's the everyday life of women suffering from Endometriosis!

Despite all of this, or even better, because of all this, women with Endometriosis are true warriors, fighters, winners, and wonderful human beings! After years and years of physical and emotional distress, they are still able to find the best of themselves and be successful. And due to the many specialists (in conventional and alternative medicine, psychology, etc.) available today, we have an almost endless number of resources to make our lives better, with the quality and happiness we deserve.

Vera Freitas
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