

ENDOMETRIOSIS: the facts



Helen Harper, of Spire Norwich Hospital, talks to Norfolk patient Julie about her recent gynaecological surgery undertaken by Mr Tim Duncan, Consultant Gynaecologist at the Colney-based private hospital.

As women, we put up with a lot. From fluctuating weight and mood swings, to bloated tummies and stomach cramps, period symptoms can be hard to live with. Although most of us tend to simply try to just “get on with it”, we should all be aware of other possible underlying causes.

Julie, 49, from Shipdham, fell very much into the category of “grinning and bearing it”, but one day she decided to do something about it and now her life is very different.

“I had been experiencing symptoms for a very long time before I sought medical help,” she says. “My periods were very heavy and gave me terrible stomach cramps. My quality of life was affected for several days a month and my symptoms made my day-to-day life so restrictive.

“I have private medical insurance and after a particularly bad episode of pain during my menstrual cycle, I thought ‘enough is enough’ and made an appointment with my GP, who referred me to Spire Norwich Hospital.

“Consultant Gynaecologist Mr Tim Duncan had an appointment available in just a few days and I was booked in to see him. I must admit that I was very nervous before attending the appointment, but I was immediately put at ease by the welcoming reception staff.

“I was called through by Mr Duncan personally. He was so reassuring and really took the time to understand my symptoms to ascertain what may be the best options for me. I had an examination and a scan which diagnosed endometriosis.

Mr Duncan explains: “Endometriosis is a condition which can affect women at any age from when their periods begin until they stop (the menopause).

“It is thought the commonest

cause is when a small number of cells, known as endometrial cells, from the lining of the uterus (womb) are shed during menstruation. Instead of passing into the vagina, the cells pass back up the fallopian tubes into the pelvis (lower tummy). These cells then implant into the lining of the pelvis (the peritoneum) where they carry on functioning as the lining of the womb, but in the wrong place.

“These cells respond to the natural hormones the ovaries release and bleed a little each month. The blood they produce causes inflammation in the pelvis which may go on to cause pain, adhesions (scar tissue) formation between the ovaries, tubes, womb and other pelvic structures.”

Mr Duncan continues: “The treatment options available to women are varied and will very much depend on their age, the severity of their symptoms and whether they intend to have children.

“A large number of women find great relief with hormonal treatments such as the contraceptive pill and similar treatments. These can give many years of pain control and there is some evidence they reduce the progression of endometriosis. The main problem with these hormonal treatments is they are contraceptives, which is not helpful if the woman is trying to become pregnant.

“Laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery is very effective for the removal of tissue affected by endometriosis which can improve fertility and improve symptoms better than drug treatment. In Julie’s case, she did not intend to have children, therefore given the severity of her symptoms a hysterectomy was an option we discussed.”

Julie adds: “I had time to think about what treatment I wanted and opted for a hysterectomy. Before the operation I was incredibly nervous but the



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Picture: Getty Images/iStockphoto

anaesthetists, nurses and Mr Duncan were great and made me feel comfortable and reassured me. After the operation nothing seemed too much trouble for anyone, I was very well looked after.”

Mr Duncan adds: “Keyhole surgery, and in particular keyhole hysterectomy, represents a huge step forward in the quality of care we can offer women. One of the major advantages this type of surgery has over conventional operations is the recovery time - it’s much, much quicker. Patients often only need to stay in hospital for 24 hours before they are feeling comfortable enough to go home - previously four to five days was not uncommon.

“What’s even more impressive is the rapid overall recovery from the operation, which can be as little as two weeks, after which women often feel well enough to return to work. This compares very favourably with a recovery time of up to three months if a hysterectomy is performed through a cut on the tummy”.

Julie concludes: “I was so

grateful for all the team at Spire Norwich Hospital did. I never felt rushed or pressured and the whole experience was very reassuring for me, and also my husband. I would not hesitate in recommending Mr Duncan - he was very patient and always listened to me and took the time to go through everything.

“My quality of life has improved drastically and I am glad I sought help when I did.”

For further information about gynaecological surgery arrange an appointment with your family doctor or call 01603 255 614 to make a private appointment with Mr Tim Duncan.

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ASK THE SPECIALIST

Mr Guido Köhler, Consultant Plastic Surgeon at Spire Norwich Hospital, considers an unwanted after-effect of weight loss.



After losing eight stone (50kg), I have loose skin under my arms and inside my thighs which has little or no feeling. I’ve tried various exercises without improvement and wondered if this could be removed surgically, if so, are there any complications?

I see many patients in my clinic experiencing similar situations of excess skin following weight loss as the skin only tightens to a certain degree despite how many exercises you may do!

Generally speaking the more weight you lose, the less likely your skin will tighten up again. In these cases body contouring surgery is the only way to deal with excess skin. Other skin tightening methods (eg laser etc) are sadly not of any help.

Body contouring and shaping includes different plastic surgical techniques to help reshape and rejuvenate almost any area of the body. The procedures involve the removal of excess sagging fat and skin.

A thigh lift is mostly performed through incisions placed in the natural groin crease and along the inner thigh. The excess skin is removed and the tissues are lifted to smoothe the skin of the entire area below, extending to the knees.

The operation length is typically around two hours but can vary based on the patient and the extent of their excess skin. A thigh lift is usually performed as a day surgery, although it may require an overnight stay depending on the patients overall health.

To achieve the best body shape, you should be close to your ideal body weight before having this type of cosmetic surgery. I would like to see a patient who has maintained their ideal weight for at least 6 months. If you smoke, you should stop as this interferes with the healing process and recovery time, not to mention your general health.

Surgery always has a risk of complications. Usually they are very minor and can be treated without problems. For a better understanding of the procedure and the follow up I would advise every patient to consult a local plastic surgeon.

For further information on body contouring arrange an appointment with your family doctor, or call 01603 255614 to make a private appointment with Mr Guido Köhler, Consultant Plastic Surgeon.

Keep questions brief and send them to Ask the Specialist, Helen Harper, Spire Norwich Hospital, Old Watton Road, Colney, Norwich NR4 7TD. Questions will be handled with discretion and you will remain anonymous. Specialists cannot enter into direct correspondence.

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