

# Pain of endometriosis compounded by frustration of going unheard, says patient



**Shauna Bowers**  
Health Correspondent

Lisa Walsh was eventually diagnosed endometriosis, and now requires the removal of her right diaphragm

Lisa Walsh experienced shoulder and neck pain almost a decade ago when she was 19. She went to doctors and underwent tests, but it all kept coming back as normal.

Aged 25, the pain was worsening. She suspected she had endometriosis, a disease in which tissue similar to the lining of the uterus grows outside the uterus, but was told she was "too young", she said.

Finally, in 2023, the Limerick woman was diagnosed with stage four endometriosis, and the disease has spread to such an extent, she requires the removal of her right diaphragm.

"It's so frustrating and isolating to know there's something wrong with your body but to not be believed," the now 28-year-old said.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), endometriosis is a chronic disease associated with severe, life-impacting pain during periods, sexual intercourse, bowel movements and/or urination, chronic pelvic pain, abdominal bloating, nausea, fatigue, and sometimes depression, anxiety and infertility.

There is no known cure for endometriosis and treatment is

usually aimed at controlling symptoms.

For Walsh, however, her condition is diaphragmatic endometriosis, a rare form of the disease, in which tissue that resembles the uterine lining, called the endometrium, grows on the diaphragm. She had heard of endometriosis prior to her diagnosis, but she, like many people, did not realise it could grow outside the pelvic region.

She underwent diagnostic testing in January of this year. As part of her treatment she was placed on induced menopause for six months. In May she had excision surgery, in which a consultant gynaecologist removed the endometrial cells.

But soon after, the pain in her shoulder returned, a symptom, she was told, of nerve irritation caused by endometriosis. Realising the surgery in May focused on her pelvic area, she decided to book a consultation with a thoracic consultant, based in Oxford, to see if there was some endometriosis up higher in the body that was not removed in the surgery.

"I thought it would make sense to have a thoracic specialist to have a look to see if anything was missed. I thought it would just be a few little bits but I was shocked by the findings. He said if he removed my diaphragm and opened it like a book, it would be all endometriosis," she said.

**Surgery**  
As a result, her consultant has recommended she undergo open surgery to remove her right diaphragm and replace it with mesh. Keyhole surgery is required on the left diaphragm. The open surgery, however, will leave her permanently disabled.

"I'm leaning towards the surgery because the endometriosis will just keep growing. It could wreck the left side because the left is salvageable at the minute and the right side is just too far gone. So if I don't do anything then the endometriosis will get worse and it will just make holes in the dia-



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on the bad days because when I will get a period, it might get sore again. And I'd have a wheelchair for the really, really bad days. But it's mainly just catching my breath that it will affect."

Last August she set up an online community called the Éire Emerald Collective, which allows other women who have been diagnosed with endometriosis, adenomyosis and PCOS to meet and discuss their difficulties both with the conditions as well as with getting a diagnosis.

This has created a great sense of solidarity, she said, due to how isolating the process can be. They've started a campaign called

#BelieveHerPain.

"We get messages from women saying that we've really helped their mental health. When you're disregarded, you feel invisible. But when you come to the page, they feel seen and heard," she said.

**Early diagnosis**

Ms Walsh said early diagnosis and prevention before the disease spreads was "so, so important".

"How many times do women have to lose organs to be taken seriously? That's why I kind of wanted to be screaming and shouting from the rooftops and getting the word out there," she said.

"If I was believed 10 years

■ Lisa Walsh set up the Éire Emerald Collective, which allows women who have been diagnosed with endometriosis, adenomyosis and PCOS to meet online and discuss their difficulties both with the conditions and with getting a diagnosis.

PHOTOGRAPH: SHAUNA BOWERS

ago, maybe it wouldn't be this extensive. This surgery was my third one this year and I'm facing another two. And that's why I'm so angry because where does it end? This could have been prevented, my expenses, my case, it could have been prevented. So yeah, it makes me very, very angry."

# Binge drinking 'back' to levels of before pandemic

SHAUNA BOWERS

More than two-fifths of men binge drink on a typical drinking occasion such as a night out, according to a study assessing the health of the nation.

The Department of Health yesterday published its 2024 Healthy Ireland survey, which was conducted by polling company Ipsos B&A. Almost 7,400 people aged over 15 participated in the research.

It found that 28 per cent of people binge drink on a typical night out, up from 24 per cent last year. For men, this figure is 42 per cent while for women it is 14 per cent. Binge drinking is defined as consuming six or more drinks in one sitting.

Men aged 15 to 24 have the highest level of binge drinking at 50 per cent with this age group also having the highest prevalence among women at 26 per cent. Increases were seen among all age groups between 25 and 64.

Kieran O'Leary, director of Ipsos B&A, said moderate alcohol consumption has not yet returned to levels seen before the Covid-19 pandemic levels. However, he said there is a "very concerning" increase in binge drinking which is "back in line" with rates seen pre-pandemic.

Prof Mary Horgan, the department's chief medical officer, said there is a need to look at the issue of binge drinking "over a period of time".

"We need to get a better understanding of who it's happening to age group wise [and] where it's happening. Is it at home? Is it pre-drinking before people go out? Or is it all outside? And then trying to develop policy to underpin the safe consumption of alcohol."

They survey also highlighted a decrease in the numbers meeting physical activity guidelines and a reduction in the numbers eating the recommended five portions of

fruit and vegetables per day.

A total of 41 per cent of people achieve the national physical activity guidelines, which recommends 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise a week. Mr O'Leary said there is a "persistent gender gap in physical activity levels". Half of men met the recommended activity levels, but the rate fell to just 33 per cent among women.

The survey found 17 per cent of the population are smokers, broadly in line with the 18 per cent recorded last year. There has been a downward trend in this area, with 23 per cent smoking in 2014. Some 8 per cent of the population currently use e-cigarettes either daily (5 per cent) or occasionally (3 per cent).

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**Binge drinking is defined as consuming six or more drinks in one sitting**

The survey, for the first time, included a question on long Covid, symptoms of the disease that continue for four or more weeks following the initial infection. Seven per cent of respondents reported experiencing symptoms of long Covid at some point in time, with 3 per cent receiving an official diagnosis from a doctor.

This year's survey also examined caring, with the proportion who said they were carers rising from 9 per cent in 2019 to 14 per cent this year. A carer provides regular unpaid personal help to a friend or family member with a long-term illness, health problem or disability.

Some 17 per cent of parents said they were also caregivers, with people in this group having a higher prevalence of probable mental health problems (15 per cent) compared parents generally (12 per cent).



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