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Pathogenesis of endometriosis: natural immunity dysfunction or autoimmune disease?

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Abstract

Endometriosis is a chronic inflammatory disease, characterized by implantation and growth of endometrial tissue outside the uterine cavity. This disabling condition is considered one of the most frequent diseases in gynecology, affecting 15-20% of women in their reproductive life. Pelvic endometriosis, the most common form of the disease, is associated with increased secretion of pro-inflammatory cytokines, neo-angiogenesis, intrinsic anomalies of the refluxed endometrium and impaired function of cell-mediated natural immunity. Recently, endometriosis has also been considered to be an autoimmune disease, owing to the presence of autoantibodies, the association with other autoimmune diseases and recurrent immune-mediated abortion. These findings are in apparent contradiction with the reduced cell-mediated natural immunity observed during the disease. In this review, we focus on the multiple processes underlying the complex pathogenesis of endometriosis, with particular emphasis on the role played by the immune system with the induction of autoimmunity.

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