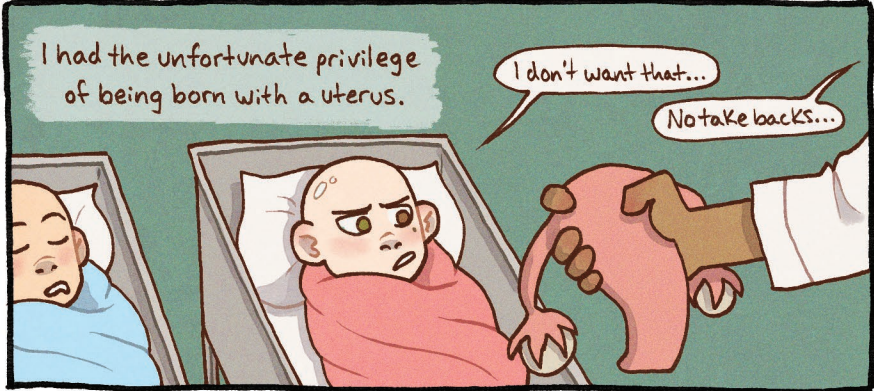


MY NUMBER 7 IS A VELOCIRAPTOR



THE STRUGGLE OF LIVING
WITH AN INVISIBLE ILLNESS

BY TORI CONWAY



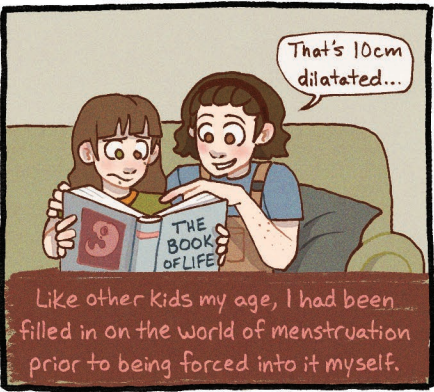
I had the unfortunate privilege of being born with a uterus.

I don't want that...

No take backs...



Lucky for me, I also had a mom who wasn't afraid of saying the word "Vagina!"

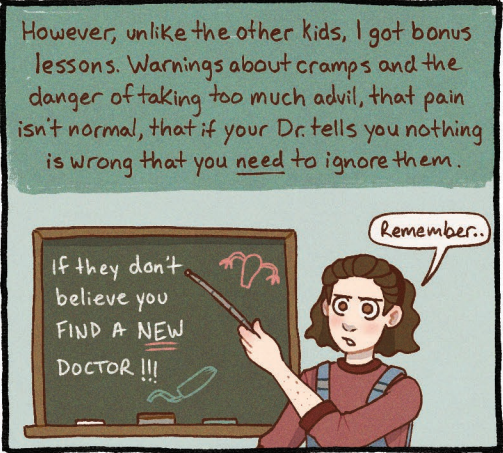


That's 10cm dilatated...

Like other kids my age, I had been filled in on the world of menstruation prior to being forced into it myself.



Pads vs tampons and the fear of toxic shock, cycles, cramps, and the best ways to hide your hygiene products.



However, unlike the other kids, I got bonus lessons. Warnings about cramps and the danger of taking too much advil, that pain isn't normal, that if your Dr. tells you nothing is wrong that you need to ignore them.

Remember..

If they don't believe you
FIND A NEW
DOCTOR !!!

Lessons that some parents didn't give.

But that's because unlike my mother, they didn't have endometriosis.



This causes inflammation and the formation of scar tissue and lesions known as "chocolate cysts"

The Most Common Symptoms:

- ▷ Chronic pelvic pain
- ▷ Painful sex
- ▷ Extreme nausea/vomiting
- ▷ Infertility
- ▷ Constipation/diarrhea
- ▷ Painful urination/bowel movements

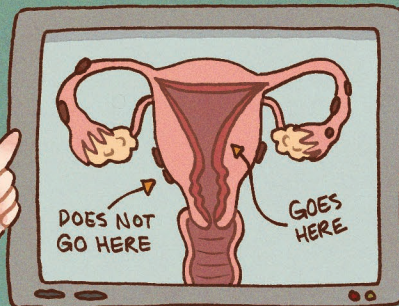
not real choco

There are several theories about the cause, but as of right now, no one knows for certain.

However, you are more likely to get it if one of your immediate family members has it.



Endo is a reproductive disorder. The tissue that you normally find lining the inside of your uterus somehow begins to grow outside of it, even fusing itself to different organs throughout your abdomen.



Endo affects 1 out of 10 uterus folk. Many don't even know that they have it since one's symptoms can change depending on where the lesions take root.

Your best bet is trying to find a way to manage your symptoms and pain, a long and arduous task.

They can even make it up to your lungs. There is also no cure.



So you can imagine that at 14, when I found myself curled up on the floor of the girl's bathroom, physically sick from the pain, I knew exactly what was up.

Thanks but you still stink



I knew this was the start of an endless journey. A journey in trying to find pain relief, of trying to get just one doctor to believe me, of trying to work my life around the inevitable inconvenience of chronic pain.

Hey, I can't come in later, I have...

...my period?

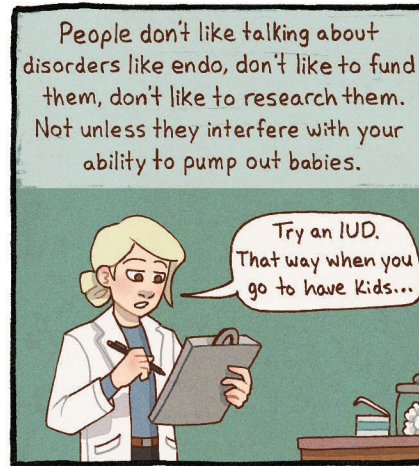
...a severe and incurable reproductive disorder characterized by chronic pain and bleeding?

...an appointment...



People don't like talking about disorders like endo, don't like to fund them, don't like to research them. Not unless they interfere with your ability to pump out babies.

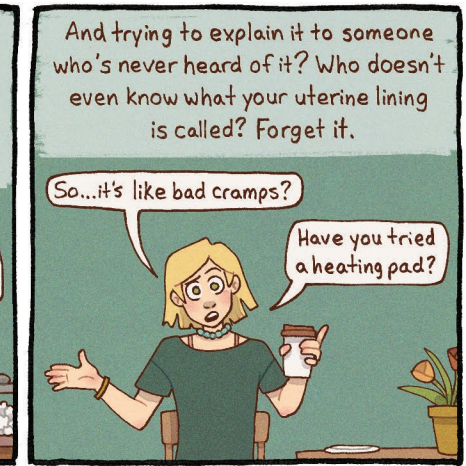
Try an IUD. That way when you go to have kids...



And trying to explain it to someone who's never heard of it? Who doesn't even know what your uterine lining is called? Forget it.

So...it's like bad cramps?

Have you tried a heating pad?



How do I explain that it's not just "bad cramps"?

How do I explain that it's pain so bad, so severe, that throwing up?

That's just a normal Tuesday for me.



That when I described my cramps to my Mom she said it sounded like birthing contractions?

That sometimes I bleed so much I have to swap pads every 20 minutes?

That I can't walk?

Can't think?



I hate number scales. How can you measure pain with numbers? Sure, my pain might be a 7, but maybe my 7 is someone else's 10?

WHAT THE FUCK?! THIS HURTS!!!



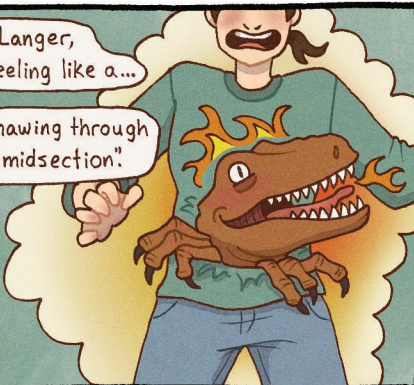
Huh... Kinda tickles...



CRAMP SIMULATOR

I once read an article by Rachel Langer, where she described her cramps as feeling like a...

"velociraptor on fire gnawing through every fiber in [her] midsection."



I find this description almost poetic in its accuracy.

My only change? My partially gnawed midsection is also wrapped in barbed wire.

And everything is aflame, not just the raptor.

The day that I finally managed to wrangle a referral from my Dr, promising to try yet another useless birth control, I prepared for the appointment like I was heading to battle.

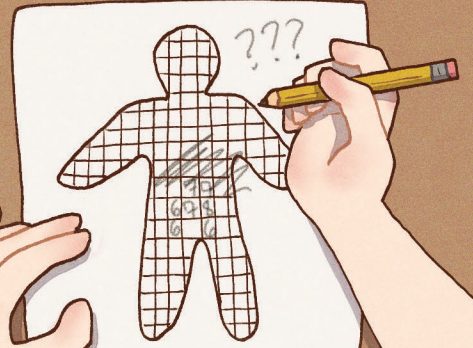
So the pain is gone... but is it normal to bleed for 6 weeks straight?

Probably not...

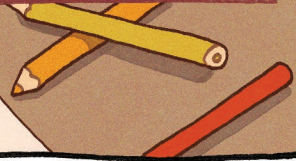
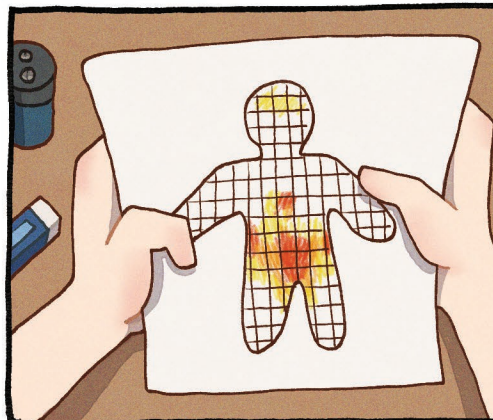


I brought lists of tried and failed meds, a checklist of symptoms and risk factors, and a pain chart.

Normally you'd fill this chart using numbers, rating your pain on a scale depending on the location.



But I was worried that the Dr still wouldn't get it and so, like the artist I am, I coloured it in shades of urgent yellows and violent reds.



I came to this appointment ready for a fight.



It'll take some time, but it's not all in your head.



My Mom had warned me that when I finally decided to start trying to get a diagnosis that, like most people, it would probably take anywhere from 8 to 12 years.

Before my appointment the nurse gave me a handout about endo in order to 'familiarize' myself with it. I laughed. I didn't have the heart to tell her that I'd known about it for almost 2 decades.

...just some light reading.



It's my grade 10 science fair project all over again...

Oh, you're thinking of something else, you don't have that...



I expected the Dr. to blow me off...

reading from Google

Do you have constant heavy flow?



Sometimes?

...to tell me to stop reading Web MD...

Just take these for a week straight...

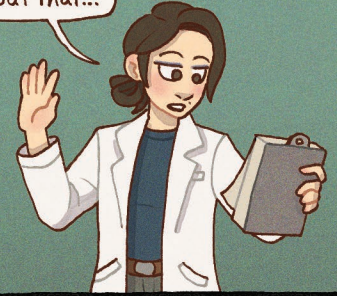


...to suggest I try yet another birth control or take even more advil.

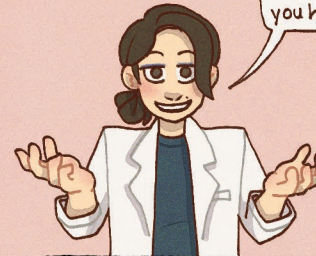
But before I could say anything, before I could pull out my piles of medical info to prove that I wasn't crazy, she informed me that we wouldn't bother wasting time trying to figure out if I had endo or not.



We're not talking about that...



She said it was obvious.



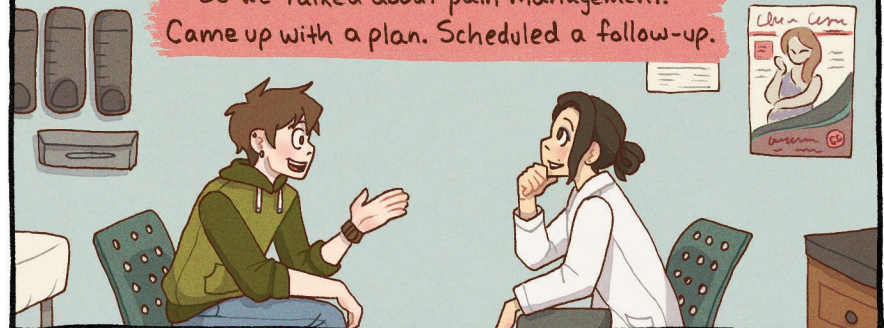
Of course you have it!

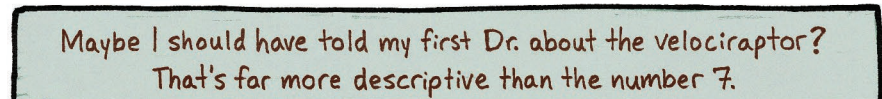
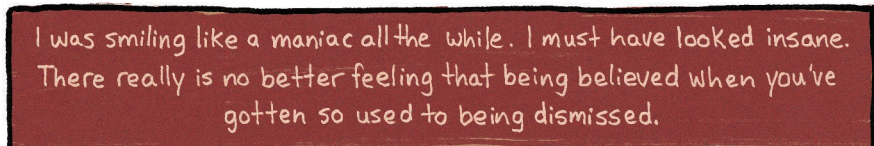
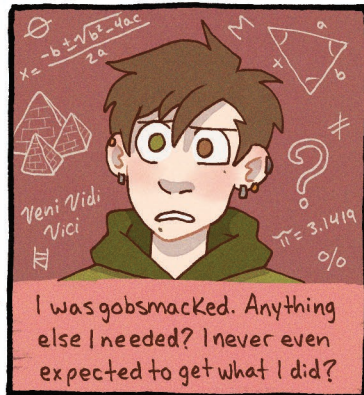


Wut?

I had it. I was right.

So we talked about pain management. Came up with a plan. Scheduled a follow-up.





THE END

Remember!

I am not a medical professional.
If you think you have endo
or if you struggle with period pain,
PLEASE be sure to talk to an actual doctor.

And don't forget:

It is not all in your head.

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