Pelvic pain and cramping can interfere with daily activities. Several reasons can be the cause, but a common problem in women is Endometriosis, especially during the reproductive age. It can cause painful period cramps, chronic pain and pain with intercourse. It also can cause infertility.

Endometriosis occurs when the tissue that normally sheds monthly from the uterine lining grows outside the uterus, such as into the fallopian tubes, ovaries or other organs. It is more likely to happen in women who have delayed child bearing or who have a family history of the disease. This endometrial tissue, that is outside the uterus, results in inflammation, scarring, adhesions and the release of hormones that cause pain and make it difficult for affected women to conceive.

Fortunately there are good treatments for this health problem. Early detection is critical and regular gynecological checkups can help determine if endometriosis is a concern based on specific physical findings and ultrasound evaluations. We often begin treatments with simple therapies including acupuncture, Chinese herbal therapies and pain relief. Exercise and massage therapy can often alleviate symptoms. Decreasing excess estrogen with diet, exercise and weight loss can be helpful as well.

At times medications such as birth control pills or newer more aggressive medications such as progestins, Danazol or Lupron are used. These medications decrease the impact of endometriosis. In cases of suspected severe endometriosis, surgery is indicated. Surgery offers the opportunity to destroy the endometriosis, resulting in decreased pain and improved fertility.

Recent studies have shown that aggressive removal of the endometriosis can be more beneficial than simply lasering or electrical burning of these areas. It is known that endometrial lesions grow much deeper than was previously thought. At North Valley Hospital, we use the da Vinci Robot to search out these lesions. This allows us to remove them from the patient to give longer lasting relief, restore fertility, and hopefully cure the disease. The robot allows magnified viewing of the pelvic organs and the dexterity to be aggressive, but safe.

Robotic surgery allows us to remove fibroids, treat prolapse, and to perform hysterectomies as well, with minimal bleeding and quicker return to normal activities.

If you are concerned that you may have endometriosis, please contact your health care provider for an exam and more information.

A good website is www.mayoclinic.org/wiki/Endometriosis for a more complete review of symptoms and treatment options.

Dr. Beach is a partner with OB/GYN's Mirna Bowden, MD, and Kathleen Lewison, MD, at Alpine Women's Center in Whitefish.

SPRING INTO ACTION
Do you have an interest in your health? In an informal, relaxed atmosphere, learn about the various health issues that most effect women, such as endometriosis, bladder health, osteoporosis, menopause, and single-site surgery. Join the health professionals at Alpine Women's Center, North Valley Surgical Services, North Valley Physical Therapy, Whitefish Therapy & Sports Center, and more during the Spring into Action women's fair Saturday, May 4 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Best Western Rocky Mountain Lodge in Whitefish. Don't miss out on a light: lunch catered by the North Valley Hospital Café, raffles and the camaraderie of supportive professionals and women. The event is sponsored by North Valley Hospital and 406 Women Magazine. Please RSVP by calling 406.863.3632 or emailing nmorrison@nvhosp.org.