

POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

What You Need to Know

What is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)?

PCOS is a hormonal disorder that causes the ovaries to produce high levels of androgens (hormones that contribute to growth and reproduction). This hormone imbalance leads to irregular menstrual cycles and ovulation which causes small cysts or fluid-filled sacs to form in the ovaries.

PCOS is one of the most common causes of female infertility, affecting 6% to 12% of US women of reproductive age. This lifelong health condition continues far beyond the child-bearing years. Women of every race and ethnicity can have PCOS.

Signs and Symptoms of PCOS

- Irregular or missed periods; an irregular period is when the gap between periods is less than 21 days or more than 35 days
- Enlarged ovaries or ovarian cysts
- Excess body hair on chest, stomach or back (also called Hirsutism)
- Weight gain around belly or abdomen
- Acne and oily skin
- Bald or thinning hair
- Infertility
- Skin tags on and around neck and arm pits
- Dark or thick skin on back of the neck, armpits, or under breasts

What causes PCOS?

The exact cause is not clear; however, insulin resistance, obesity and hereditary factors play a role in PCOS.

How is PCOS diagnosed?

Your doctor can determine if you have PCOS, by checking that you have at least two of the following symptoms:

- Irregular ovulation, indicated by an irregular menstrual cycle or lack of a cycle.
- Multiple small cysts on the ovaries seen on a pelvic ultrasound.
- Blood test confirming increased androgen levels.

What is the treatment for PCOS?

PCOS cannot be cured, but symptoms can be managed through lifestyle changes or medications such as:

- Change in diet
- Increase in physical activity
- Medications such as birth controls pills, those used to treat diabetes or induce ovulation. Discuss with your health care provider.

Diet and lifestyle changes can manage PCOS and improve weight, fertility, insulin resistance and other symptoms.

Nutrition and Diet Changes

Discuss with health care provider what changes may be right for you including:

- Limit foods and beverages with “added sugar”.
 - Added sugars can be found in candies and sweets, soda, sports drinks, and juice.
 - Find added sugar on the nutrition facts label. Aim for less than 50 grams a day.
- Reduce refined carbohydrates.
 - These grains have been stripped of bran, fiber, and many nutrients. They include foods made with “white” flour such as bread, rice, and pasta.
- Choose complex carbohydrates.
 - They are packed with fiber, vitamins, and minerals and include whole grains, brown rice, oatmeal, fruits, vegetables, and beans/legumes.
- Limit advanced glycation end products (AGEs).
 - Diets high in AGEs can imbalance your body’s antioxidants and cause inflammation. Common sources of AGEs include burnt, seared or crispy foods, chips, cookies, processed meats, and meat with grill marks.
 - Tips to reduce AGEs:
 - Marinate meats before cooking; cook foods on low temperature or use moisture.
 - Eat these plant-based foods to reduce absorption of AGEs and protect against damage: green tea, apples, berries, broccoli, carrots, chill peppers, cumin, flax, ginger, oats, olive oil, red cabbage, onions, sesame seeds, spinach, and turmeric.
- Increase omega 3 fatty acids to reduce inflammation, improve hormone, and blood fat levels.
 - Try foods such as salmon, shrimp, cold water fish, flax seeds, walnuts, chia seeds, sardines, and soybeans.
 - Omega 3 supplements may be recommended if your intake of these foods is low. Consider 1,000-4,000mg of a combination of EPA and DHA (forms of omega 3 fatty acids) per day.
- Increase magnesium to reduce symptoms of PCOS such as lack or loss of hair, acne, and abnormal uterine bleeding.
 - Try spinach, almonds, dark chocolate, black beans, peanuts, fortified cereal, pumpkin seeds, soymilk, and quinoa.
- Restrict eating to an 8-hour time window.
 - This can improve menstruation, regulate certain hormones, reduce body fat, decrease insulin resistance, and inflammation.

Lifestyle Changes

- Increase your physical activity to 120-150 minutes per week of high intensity exercise and resistance training 2 or more times per week. Try these suggestions:
 - Take the stairs instead of an elevator.
 - Park further away at the store.
 - Wear a pedometer or fitness watch to track steps and get daily movement reminders or use motivational apps.
 - Join an exercise group or club.
 - View free fitness videos on YouTube or other websites.
 - Discuss stress and sleep habits with your health care provider.

24-102, Rev. 03/28/2024