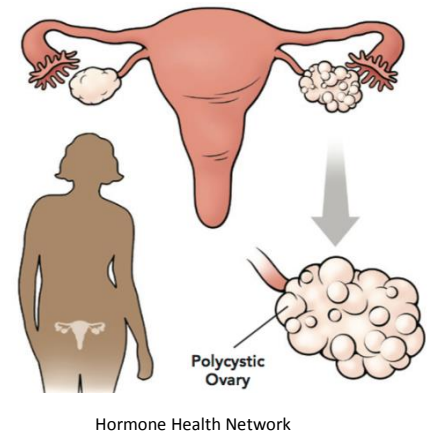


Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

What is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome?

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a condition affecting 7% to 10% of women. It affects hormone levels, menstrual cycles, and physical appearance.

Women with PCOS develop small, painless cysts (little sacs filled with fluid) in the ovaries. These cysts are not dangerous but can cause changes in hormones. Because of this, PCOS can cause changes to your periods and may make it difficult to get pregnant.



Women with PCOS have higher levels of male hormones called **androgens**, which affects your ability to become pregnant. Having higher androgen levels may cause acne, weight gain, and increased hair growth.

What causes PCOS?

The exact cause of PCOS is unknown, but genetics seem to be a factor. If female relatives or family members have PCOS, you are at a higher risk of developing it as well. High levels of androgens and/or high levels of the hormone insulin (which helps control blood sugar levels) may cause PCOS.

Signs and Symptoms

- Irregular or absent menstrual periods (oligomenorrhea or amenorrhea)
- Difficulties getting pregnant
- Weight gain (especially at the waist) and trouble losing weight
- Acne
- Excess hair on the face and body (also known as hirsutism)
- Thinning hair on the scalp
- Darkening of skin on neck, groin, thighs, and/or breasts
- Skin tags on neck or armpits

How is PCOS diagnosed?

There is no single test to diagnose PCOS. To diagnose PCOS, your doctor may do the following:

- Review your medical history and menstrual cycle.
- A **physical exam** to check your weight, body mass index, and to measure your blood pressure. The doctor will also look for signs of PCOS such as extra body hair, acne, or darkened skin.
- A **pelvic exam** to look for signs of extra androgens and swollen ovaries.
- A **pelvic ultrasound** to check for cysts on the ovaries.
- A **blood test** to check hormone, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels.

How is PCOS treated?

Currently, there is no cure for PCOS, but symptoms can be treated using medications and by making changes to your diet and exercise.



Treatment options include:

- **Diet and Physical Activity:** eating healthy and regular physical activity can help decrease the symptoms of PCOS and may help you lose weight, which can also reduce symptoms.
- **Birth Control Pills or Anti-Androgen Medications:** may be used to treat hormone imbalances to regulate periods, reduce extra hair growth, and to reduce acne.
- **Metformin:** may be used to help the body respond better to insulin and may lower androgen levels.
- **Fertility Drugs:** may be used if fertility problems are not improved by lifestyle changes alone, as fertility medications can improve ovulation.
- **Medications or Creams:** may be used to decrease the amount of excess hair growth on the body.

Be sure to talk to your doctor if you have questions about the types of treatments available to you.

Other Conditions Associated with PCOS

Although PCOS has to do with the ovaries, it can affect your whole body. PCOS may lead to:

- **Diabetes:** In PCOS, the body is not able to use insulin properly, which helps control blood sugar levels. Because of this, women with PCOS may develop insulin resistance, which increases your risk of Type 2 Diabetes in the future.
- **Heart Attack or Stroke:** Women with PCOS often have high levels of bad cholesterol (LDL), lower levels of good cholesterol (HDL), and high blood pressure, which increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **Sleep Apnea:** This is a condition where breathing stops repeatedly while sleeping. This can worsen insulin resistance and can increase your risk of heart problems and diabetes.
- **Uterine (Endometrial) Cancer:** This may happen because the lining of the uterus does not shed as often due to problems with menstrual cycles and lack of ovulation.