

POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

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Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

Women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) have a hormonal imbalance that interferes with normal reproductive processes. PCOS usually starts at puberty and is associated with irregular periods and other hormone-related symptoms. The most concerning issues with PCOS are the increase of infertility, the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and the higher risk of developing endometrial (uterine) cancer at an early age.

What are the symptoms of PCOS?

- Irregular menstrual periods, or no menstrual periods at all.
- Decreased frequency or complete lack of ovulation, resulting in problems with infertility.
- Obesity, often specifically characterized by weight gain in the upper body and abdomen.
- Oily skin and hair and persistent acne into adulthood.
- Abnormal hair growth, in a masculine distribution (facial hair, heavy hair growth on arms, chest, and abdomen).
- Tendency to develop type 2 diabetes.

What causes PCOS syndrome?

Research is ongoing to uncover a cause for PCOS. There is evidence that shows a link between certain forms of PCOS and family history, suggesting a genetic basis for the condition.

How is PCOS diagnosed?

Most cases can be diagnosed with a thorough evaluation of your medical history and symptoms, as well as a physical exam. A blood test may be required to measure the levels of various hormones. In some cases, an ultrasound of the ovaries may help with diagnosis.

How is PCOS treated?

Although PCOS can be treated with medications, treatment is often highly dependent on your goals and your symptoms.

If you want to become pregnant, you may need the assistance of oral or injected fertility medications. If you do not want to become pregnant, you may consider birth control pills to prevent pregnancy and regulate periods. Periods can also be regulated using the hormone progesterone.

There is also a non-hormonal treatment option which is a medication usually used for diabetes. Even if you don't have diabetes, this medication may help restore fertility and assist with weight loss.

Other symptoms such as unwanted hair growth, acne, obesity, and diabetes should be managed by specialists in those areas. Birth control pills are often helpful in the treatment of hair growth and acne.

Specific treatment options should be discussed with your physician.

How can PCOS be prevented?

There is no known prevention for PCOS. However, through proper nutrition and weight management, many women with polycystic ovary syndrome can avoid developing diabetes and cardiovascular problems.

How can I improve my chances of conceiving if I have PCOS?

While specific fertility issues should be addressed with your physician, there are some general healthcare guidelines that may improve your chances of becoming pregnant:

- Folic acid (400 mcg. supplement a day, with a diet rich in folic acid, including leafy green vegetables, dried beans, liver, and citrus fruits)
- Limit caffeine (Fewer than two caffeinated beverages per day)
- Eat well (Healthy well-balanced diet)
- Exercise and maintain a healthy weight (maintain a normal exercise routine, 20 to 30 minutes per day, 4 to 5 times per week)

This information is provided by your physician and the Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine and the Cleveland Clinic Center for Specialized Women's Health. This information has not been designed to replace a physician's medical assessment and medical judgment.

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