

# Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome

## What is polycystic ovarian syndrome?

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a hormone-related disorder that affects millions of women, most without their knowledge. Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) cause cysts to form on your ovaries. Cysts are bumps that are filled with fluid. The cysts can prevent your ovaries from working correctly.

## What causes PCOS?

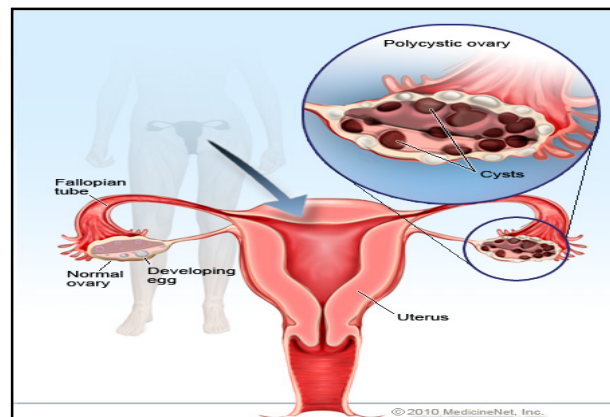
The exact cause of PCOS is not known. It is believed that increased insulin levels may cause the ovaries to produce higher than normal amounts of male hormones. Insulin is produced in the pancreas and helps your body use sugar. Your risk may be increased if you have a family member with PCOS or other ovarian disease.

### PCOS Scenario...

Estimates suggest that between 5 -10% of the female reproductive population may have PCOS, and the number may actually be even higher among younger women because infertility is the primary clue that leads to most diagnoses. PCOS is the most prevalent hormone imbalance in women under the age of 50, yet nearly 70% of cases are presumed to be undiagnosed.

## What are the signs and symptoms of PCOS?

- Irregular or absent monthly periods
- Increased hair growth on the face, chest, around the nipples, or lower abdomen
- Thinning of scalp hair
- Weight gain and fatigue
- High blood sugar levels or high blood pressure
- Infertility (problem getting pregnant)
- Acne, darkening of the skin, or skin tags
- Pelvic or abdominal pain



## How is PCOS diagnosed?

- **Blood tests:** These can test your hormone, blood sugar levels and lipid level.
- **Pelvic exam:** This exam checks the size and shape of your uterus, cervix, and ovaries.
- **Vaginal ultrasound:** An ultrasound uses sound waves to show pictures of your ovaries on a monitor so we can check for cysts. A small tube is placed into your vagina.

## How is PCOS treated?

There is no cure for PCOS. Treatment depends on the particular patient's signs and symptoms, as well as her goals. Treatment options include:

- **Medicines:**
  - **Birth control pills:** These medicines have female hormones, and may decrease male hormone levels. Birth control pills may control your periods, prevent cysts, or cause them to shrink. They also help decrease your risk of endometrial cancer and correct abnormal bleeding.

- **Hypoglycemic medicines:** These help to lower your blood sugar levels and decrease insulin resistance. They are also used to lower male hormone levels and help you ovulate.
- **Antiandrogen medicines:** These may help decrease male hormone levels, excess hair growth, and thinning scalp hair.
- **Steroids:** These may help lower the release of male hormones.
- **NSAIDs:** These medicines decrease swelling and pain.
- **Surgery:**  
Your doctor may do surgery to see your ovaries or to take a biopsy (tissue sample). He may remove cysts or part of your ovaries.

### What are the risks of PCOS?

You may get an infection or bleed too much after surgery to remove the cysts on your ovaries. Even with treatment, PCOS may return or get worse. PCOS may increase your risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease. PCOS may decrease your chances of getting pregnant. Problems with your ovulation may further lead to abnormal uterine bleeding or endometrial cancer. In women with PCOS, the ovary doesn't make all of the hormones it needs for an egg to fully mature. The follicles start to grow and build up fluid but ovulation does not occur. Instead, some follicles may remain as cysts and the hormone progesterone is not made. Without progesterone, a woman's menstrual cycle is irregular or absent.

### How can I manage my symptoms?

- **Manage your blood sugar and blood pressure:** Keep a record and bring this to your follow-up visits. Blood sugar is measured with a glucose monitor.
- **Maintain a healthy weight:** Create a weight loss plan if you are overweight. Weight loss may help reduce the complications of PCOS.
- **Exercise:** Exercise can help decrease blood sugar and blood pressure. It may also help with weight loss.
- **Eat a variety of healthy foods:** Healthy foods include fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads, low-fat dairy products, beans, lean meats, and fish. A dietitian may help you plan meals that are lower in carbohydrates to help you manage your blood sugar levels.

### When should you contact your doctor?

- You have a fever.
- You feel weak or tired.
- You have pain during sex.
- Your pain is worse or does not go away after you take your pain medicine.
- You have trouble urinating or emptying your bladder completely.

### When should you seek immediate care?

- You have a severe headache or feel dizzy.
- You vomit multiple times and cannot keep food or liquids down.
- You have blurred or double vision.
- Your breath has a fruity sweet smell, or you feel short of breath.
- You have severe lower abdominal or pelvic pain.

#### Non-Pharmacological Remedies:

- Decreasing stress by practicing yoga.
- Eating low glycemic and high fiber foods (fiber prevents recirculation of hormones from the gut and increases testosterone excretion).
- Other dietary and lifestyle changes, such as omitting sugar, avoiding dairy products, eating more protein and using more omega-3 oils.

**Reference:** Micromedex's Care Notes Systems Online 2.0

