

POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN SYNDROME (PCOS)

What is PCOS?

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) is a common hormonal disorder affecting women of reproductive age. It occurs when a woman's ovaries produce an abnormal amount of androgens, male sex hormones that are usually present in women in small amounts. This imbalance can lead to a variety of symptoms, including irregular menstrual cycles, difficulty with ovulation, and the presence of multiple small cysts on the ovaries.

Symptoms of PCOS:

- **Irregular Periods:** Menstrual cycles may be less frequent, prolonged, or absent altogether due to infrequent ovulation.
- **Excess Androgens:** This can result in physical signs like increased facial and body hair (hirsutism), acne, or thinning hair on the scalp.
- **Ovarian Cysts:** Small, fluid-filled sacs may develop on the ovaries, although not every woman with PCOS has ovarian cysts.
- **Weight Gain:** Many women with PCOS experience difficulty managing their weight.
- **Infertility:** PCOS is one of the leading causes of infertility due to irregular or absent ovulation.
- **Insulin Resistance:** Many women with PCOS have higher insulin levels, which can lead to weight gain and an increased risk of type 2 diabetes.

Causes of PCOS:

The exact cause of PCOS is unknown, but several factors may contribute:

- **Genetics:** PCOS tends to run in families, suggesting a genetic component.
- **Insulin Resistance:** Excess insulin can increase androgen production, leading to difficulty with ovulation.
- **Hormonal Imbalance:** Elevated levels of androgens and luteinizing hormone (LH) are common in women with PCOS, disrupting normal ovulation.

Diagnosis of PCOS:

- **Medical History and Symptoms:** Your doctor will assess symptoms like menstrual irregularities, hirsutism, and weight gain.
- **Physical Exam:** This may include checking for signs of excess hair growth, acne, and skin conditions.
- **Ultrasound:** Imaging of the ovaries can reveal the presence of cysts.
- **Blood Tests:** Hormone levels, including androgens, LH, and insulin, are often measured to confirm the diagnosis.



Treatment of PCOS:

While there is no cure for PCOS, treatment focuses on managing symptoms and preventing complications. Options include:

Lifestyle Changes:

- **Diet and Exercise:** A healthy diet and regular physical activity can help manage weight and reduce symptoms like insulin resistance.
- **Weight Loss:** Even a modest reduction in weight can improve hormone balance and menstrual regularity.

Medications:

- **Pills:** Hormonal contraceptives help regulate the menstrual cycle, reduce androgens, and control acne and excess hair growth.
- **Metformin:** This diabetes medication is often prescribed to manage insulin resistance and help regulate ovulation.
- **Fertility Medications:** Clomiphene or letrozole may be prescribed to stimulate ovulation if you are trying to conceive.
- **Anti-Androgen Medications:** These can reduce symptoms like excess hair growth and acne.

Potential Complications:

If untreated, PCOS can lead to several long-term health issues, including:

- Type 2 Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure
- Heart Disease
- Endometrial Cancer (due to the lack of regular menstrual periods)
- Sleep Apnea

Living with PCOS:

Managing PCOS often involves long-term lifestyle and medical adjustments. Support from healthcare providers, lifestyle changes, and medications can help you manage symptoms and improve overall health.

Regular check-ups and monitoring for complications are important.