

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome



What is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)?

PCOS occurs when a woman's hormones are not in balance. There are higher levels of male hormones called androgens. As a result, fluid filled sacs called cysts can grow in the ovaries where eggs are made. These cysts do not allow the egg to leave the ovary. These cysts are not painful and more than 50% of women with PCOS don't have them. Symptoms often occur during teenage years or shortly after a female gets her first period.

Are these cysts harmful?

No. They are not cancer and do not need to be removed. They are not painful and removing the cysts will not cure the disease. The cysts are a result of the disease itself.

What causes PCOS?

No one knows for sure, but it runs in families. It also is more common in women who are obese or who have high insulin levels.

What are the common symptoms?

- Menstrual periods are not regular or do not occur at all
- The egg does not leave the ovary, which may make it hard to get pregnant
- More hair grows on the face, chest, stomach, back, and pubic area
- Acne and oily skin
- Overweight, especially around the waist
- Thick, dark patches of skin appear on the neck, armpits, skin folds, and on the inside of the upper leg
- Less common symptoms may include thinning hair, tiny skin growths in the armpits or neck area, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes

How is PCOS diagnosed?

The doctor will ask questions about the woman's general health, menstrual cycles and any pregnancies. The doctor also will perform an exam. Blood tests may be done to check hormone levels but hormone levels are not always abnormal, even when you have the disease. A pelvic ultrasound may be done to check the ovaries if it is felt that the ovaries are large.

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How is PCOS treated?

PCOS will not go away but treatment can ease symptoms. Treatment depends on your symptoms, but may include lifestyle changes and medicine. Lifestyle changes to lower your insulin hormone levels in your body can help ease symptoms. These include:

- Exercise each day for at least 45 to 60 minutes
- Weight loss
- Low calorie/low carbohydrate/low fat diet

Your doctor may prescribe birth control pills to help periods be more regular, clear acne and slow the growth of excess hair. In addition, metformin (Glucophage) which is usually used to treat diabetes can return ovulation and decrease the occurrence of diabetes. It will not lower your sugar level too low if you do not have diabetes. For women who want to get pregnant, there are other medicines to help regulate periods and cause ovulation. Proper treatment can ease symptoms. Talk to your doctor if you have other questions about PCOS.

Are there long term risks with PCOS?

When a woman is not on birth control pills and does not have a period regularly, overgrowth of the lining of the uterus can occur. Over many years, this will increase your chance of developing uterine cancer. It is very important for women who are not in menopause to bleed regularly. Please remember, when you are being treated for PCOS, it will not cure the disease. It will only treat the symptoms while you are taking the medication. It returns if you stop taking your medication.

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