



Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

Information for patients

www.britspag.org

The polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a relatively common condition among adolescent girls and young women. Around 1 in 5 women may have PCOS.

What is PCOS?

PCOS involves a disturbance in the mechanisms of the ovaries to produce hormones in the correct proportions resulting in hormone imbalance. The function of the ovaries is disturbed and may cause the ovaries to enlarge and have multiple tiny fluid filled spaces referred to as polycystic ovaries.

These changes may be accompanied by symptoms such as irregular or complete absence of periods, excessive body hair and acne. As an adult, women with PCOS may find it difficult to become pregnant due to lack of releasing an egg on a regular basis.

I have infrequent periods; does that mean I have PCOS?

As a young teenager, it is quite common to have irregular periods, especially within two years of first starting your periods (menarche). This does not imply you have PCOS. It is also common for young adolescent girls to have

spotty skin and that in itself also does not constitute to PCOS. The criteria of PCOS are slightly different in adolescents than in adult women. Also, teenage ovaries can often look like polycystic ovaries on ultrasound scan, but this does not mean that you have PCOS.

How can PCOS affect me?

In a woman with regular periods, each month a follicle (a fluid filled cyst containing an egg) will grow within the ovary to about 20mm in size and then release an egg. This is called ovulation. This process is controlled by hormones which are produced by the pituitary gland in the brain, i.e. FSH (follicle stimulating hormone), LH (lutensising hormone), and by hormones produced by the ovaries; oestrogen, progesterone and androgens. In women with PCOS this cycle can be easily disrupted resulting in absent or no follicular growth and ovulation.

There are studies which show that not all young girls diagnosed with PCOS continue to have PCOS when older.

Women who are overweight and have PCOS are at greater risk of heart disease and developing type 2 diabetes. In fact being

overweight will make the symptoms of PCOS much worse.

What are the options available to treat PCOS?

The treatment options will depend on what symptom bothers you the most.

Weight Loss and Maintenance of Normal Weight

- If you are overweight or obese, It is important that you lose weight in order to improve symptoms.
- A dietician may help with a weight reduction plan aimed at realistic and sustainable goals. Dieting will help weight loss. Increasing physical activity i.e. swimming and walking should also be beneficial.
- Your GP may provide information regarding various support groups and lifestyle program available in the community

Managing infrequent period problems

- Your doctor may prescribe progesterone hormone tablets for 7 to 10 days every 3-4 months to help get periods.

- An alternative option would to prescribe combined hormone pill which can provide regular withdrawal bleeds and also provides contraception if so desired.
- PCOS can sometimes also result in over-thickening of the lining of the womb that can go on to have abnormal changes and hence it is advised that you at least have 3-4 periods in a year or have a hormone coil fitted to keep the lining of the womb thin.

Acne and excess facial and body hair problems

These can be very distressing symptoms for a young person.

- Cosmetic measures such as hair lightening agents (bleach), waxing, shaving or advanced hair removal techniques such as laser or IPL therapies may be helpful for excessive hair growth.
- However, on some occasions you may need to be given some medications that help control the excess hormones (androgens) to reduce this excess hair (hirsutism) as well as for acne. This may be in the form of combined hormone pill.

Other medications such as Metformin

- It is a drug that may be useful in treating women with PCOS. It works by making the tissues in the body more sensitive to insulin and helps bring insulin levels back to normal. It has been demonstrated in some studies to be effective in reinstating ovulation and a regular cycle in women with PCOS who lose weight.

Support Groups

Verity : The Polycystic Ovaries Self Help Group

52 – 54 Featherstone Street

London EC1Y 8AT

<http://www.verity-pcos.org.uk>

PCOS Challenge: National PCOS Association

<https://pcoschallenge.org/>

www.britspag.org

Revised by Dr Meenakshi Choudhary on behalf of BritSPAG