



PCOS – polycystic ovary syndrome

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About this information

This leaflet on PCOS is for you if you wish to know more about polycystic ovary syndrome and to help you better understand how this syndrome (a collection of symptoms) has an impact on your health. Your healthcare provider will help you with managing PCOS and the associated symptoms and assessing risks for your future health. There will also be information about some self-help measures in managing the symptoms of PCOS as well as links to further information and support groups.

Key information

- What is PCOS and why does it matter for me?
- Treatments your doctor may prescribe for PCOS
- Additional treatments and measures you can do to manage PCOS
- Other resources and support services available

What is PCOS?

PCOS stands for polycystic ovary syndrome, although its name can cause confusion as it is more than just having cysts on your ovaries. It is also important to note that the so called 'cysts' are actually follicles. These small follicles in the ovary appear in a larger number than follicles in a normal ovaries

PCOS includes a wide range of symptoms meaning it can affect people in very different ways. One teenager with PCOS may have very few symptoms whereas another may have many.

As many as 20 in 100 young people could have PCOS, with many of these having mothers or other family members who also have it. Previously scans of the ovaries were performed to count the follicles but making a diagnosis from just a scan is no longer recommended because it is common to see lots of little follicles developing on the ovaries around puberty. Many girls will have ovaries with multiple follicles but may have no symptoms.

What are the symptoms of PCOS and how is it diagnosed?

Symptoms can include: irregular and/or heavy periods, having no periods, bad acne, excessive facial or body hair, thinning of hair.

The most useful way to diagnose PCOS is with hormone blood tests

Some symptoms such as irregular periods and acne are common in teenagers which also makes the diagnosis difficult Your doctor may say that you are 'at risk of PCOS' which means that it's too difficult to yet know if you definitely will have PCOS or not.

Why does having PCOS matter?

Some people find having PCOS and managing the symptoms can be upsetting, worrying and troublesome. If you are feeling low or depressed about your symptoms, please talk to your GP/doctor.

Having PCOS can increase your risk of developing health problems in the future including heart disease and type 2 diabetes, where the body can no longer process sugar effectively.

Having less than 3 periods a year can increase the thickness of the lining of your womb which may cause problems in the future.

What medication a doctor may prescribe?

Combined Contraceptive Pill: can help to lower the level of testosterone in your body, may help to regulate your periods and improve your skin, but this may not always be an option for you if you have a high body weight or high blood pressure.

Metformin: may be considered if you have diabetes, prediabetes or you are struggling to lose enough weight to improve your symptoms, although any weight you lose is great. This tablet can have some side effects though so be sure to discuss this with your doctor first

Weight Loss Tablets: are not recommended and can be very dangerous to your health so please speak to your GP about your other options and don't try buying weight-loss products online.

Medication specific for Acne and Facial Hair

Topical treatment to help with Acne: Speak to your GP about which treatment are available to you. They may suggest Duac gel or Epiduo Gel (retinoid) Side effects: dry skin & redness

Medication to help with Acne: Lymeicycline (must be >12yrs), Roaccutane (Can only be prescribed by a dermatology specialist)

Treatments to help with facial hair: Vaniqua cream, Laser treatment (This is not always available on the NHS)

What can you do to improve symptoms of PCOS?

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and diet is one of the first and most important treatments for PCOS.

Reducing your body weight if you are overweight can reduce your risk of developing diabetes and heart problems in the future. Try setting yourself achievable goals, eating slower, thinking more about what you are eating and why.

Aim for 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity per day, including activities that strength muscle and bone, at least three times a week.

If you are struggling, then speak to your GP or health care team who may be able to refer you to someone who can help you change your diet.

Further information

Information on PCOS is available from:

1. <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/patient-leaflets/polycystic-ovary-syndrome-pcos-what-it-means-for-your-long-term-health/>
2. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/polycystic-ovary-syndrome-pcos/>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSuIKtGEQWo>

Support Groups for those with PCOS:

1. PCOS Challenge: National Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome Association
<http://www.pcoschallenge.org/>
2. Verity: <http://www.verity-pcos.org.uk/>

Sources and acknowledgements

This information has been produced by the BritSPAG Executive Committee.

The information is evidence-based (at the time of production) and a full reference list is held by the BritSPAG Executive Committee.