

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a common hormonal disorder which affects a woman's ovaries and how they work. It affects approximately 10% of women and presents with three key features:

- Cysts that develop around the edge of the ovaries
- The ovaries do not produce eggs regularly
- Higher levels of male hormones in the body

Symptoms

Symptoms can present in your late teens or twenties and may include some or all of the points below:

- Irregular or no periods
- Thinning hair and hair loss from the head
- Oily skin or acne
- Excessive hair growth - usually on the face, chest, back or buttocks
- Weight gain
- Difficulty getting pregnant because of irregular ovulation or failure to ovulate

PCOS can also be associated with an increased risk of problems in later life, such as Type II Diabetes and heart disease especially if you already have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or if you're overweight.

Cause of PCOS

The exact cause of PCOS is poorly understood, but it often runs in families. It's associated with irregular hormone levels including high levels of insulin.

Insulin is a hormone that controls sugar levels in the body and many women with PCOS tend to have too much in their body. This contributes to the increased production and activity of hormones such as testosterone. Being overweight increases the amount of insulin your body produces.

Treatment of PCOS

A number of dietary and lifestyle changes have been found to help alleviate symptoms and reduce long – term risks.

- Keep a healthy weight
- Eat a healthy and balance diet
- Choose foods with a low glycaemic index (GI)
- Exercise more

Maintain a healthy weight

This can help to lower insulin resistance and reduce many symptoms. If you are overweight aim to lose weight slowly by 0.5 – 1.0kg per week. Model meals on The Eatwell Plate below.



Low glycaemic index (GI)

Women with PCOS tend to produce too much insulin, which can increase weight. Lower GI foods keep blood glucose levels lower so the body produces less insulin. Choosing lower GI foods can help control blood glucose, insulin levels and weight.

GI is a ranking of carbohydrate-containing foods based on the overall effect on blood glucose levels. Slowly absorbed foods have a low GI rating, while foods that are more quickly absorbed have a higher rating. This is important because choosing slowly absorbed carbohydrates, instead of quickly absorbed carbohydrates, can help even out blood glucose levels.

Low GI	Intermediate GI	High GI
Porridge oats Oat based cereal e.g. <i>oat crunch</i> All Bran™ Special K™ Sultana bran	Mini-wheats Muesli Weetabix™	Corn flakes Rice Krispies™ Coco Pops™ Cheerios™ Bran flakes
Granary bread Rye bread Fruit bread Oat bread Soy and linseed bread Banana cake	Pitta bread Wholemeal bread Crumpet Ryvita™	Bagel White bread Puffed crispbread Water biscuit / cracker White French stick Baguette
Pasta e.g. spaghetti, macaroni, fettuccine, ravioli Noodles Wild rice	Taco shells Basmati rice Boiled new potatoes Couscous	Long-grain (brown and white) rice Jacket (baked) potato Oven chips Instant potato Mashed potato
Carrots Sweet potato Yam	Sweet corn Beetroot	Pumpkin (squash) Swede Parsnip

Low GI	Intermediate GI	High GI
Apple Apricot (including dried) Cherries Grapefruit Grapes Kiwi fruit Orange Peach Pear Plum	Banans Cantelope melon Mango Paw paw (papaya) Pine apple Raisins Sultanas	Watermelon Over ripe banana
Semi-skimmed, skimmed and full cream milk Custard Yoghurt – low fat, plain or fruit	Ice-cream Condensed milk	
Oatmeal Biscuits	Rich tea biscuits Digestive biscuits Cream crackers	Morning coffee biscuits
Baked beans Butter beans Chick peas Haricot beans Kidney beans Lentils Soya beans		Broad beans