



PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY SYMPTOMS OF POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME (PCOS)?

Polycystic ovarian syndrome, also known as PCOS, is a condition that can affect your fertility and general health. There are various things that you can do that can reduce the effects of this condition or make it more likely that the medications you are prescribed will work.

Some of the effects of PCOS are listed below. Remember, not everyone who has PCOS suffers from all these problems:

GYNAECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

- Irregular periods: periods can be delayed and scanty. Some women may not get any periods without medication.
- Difficulty getting pregnant: this is usually because an egg is not being released monthly.
- If you do not have a period for a very long time (several years) it can increase the chance of abnormal changes in the lining of the womb, which may even turn into cancer in rare cases.

SKIN PROBLEMS

- Increased hair growth on face, chin or tummy.
- Acne on face, chest and upper back.
- Thinning of hair.
- Darkening of skin around neck crease, groin, under crease of breast.

GENERAL HEALTH

- Weight gain.
- Mood changes, low self-esteem.
- Increased risk of diabetes in later life (10–20%). The risk is increased if you have a family history of diabetes and are overweight.

WHAT CAUSES PCOS?

The exact cause of PCOS is not known. PCOS is known to run in families, but to some extent how much you are affected depends on how you take care of your health.

There are some underlying metabolic changes like increased male hormones and increased levels of Insulin. Insulin is a hormone which helps in the uptake of glucose/sugar in the body. In PCOS, the body becomes less sensitive to Insulin (called Insulin resistance). This leads to increased production of Insulin, which then causes many of the symptoms described above.

CAN PCOS BE TREATED?

There is no cure for PCOS, but it can be managed with medications and lifestyle changes. Lifestyle changes have been shown to be as effective as medications, and should always be tried first, or in combination with any medicines that are prescribed.

Many people manage their PCOS symptoms and long-term health risks without medical intervention by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

KEEPING A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Healthy eating habits and regular physical activity can help relieve PCOS related symptoms. Losing weight may help to lower your blood glucose levels, improve the way your body uses Insulin, and help your hormones reach normal levels.

Even a 5% loss in body weight (for example, a 150-pound woman losing 7.5 pounds) can help make your periods more regular and improve your chances of getting pregnant. The aim should be to maintain your BMI as close to the normal range as possible. Normal BMI should be between 19-25. To calculate your BMI, go to NHS Choices and look for the BMI healthy weight calculator, or click here: <https://www.nhs.uk/health-assessment-tools/calculate-your-body-mass-index/>

Weight loss can help people with PCOS in the following ways:

- Periods may become more regular.
- Increased chance of getting pregnant.
- Improved self-esteem.
- Reduced skin problems – acne/facial hair.
- Reduced risk of cancer of womb.
- Reduced risk of developing Diabetes and heart problems later in life.

EXERCISE

Aerobic exercises that elevate the heart rate, are particularly beneficial. A minimum of 30 minutes' exercise 3 times a week is recommended. You can get this through jogging or going to the gym and doing group classes under the supervision of a trainer.

HEALTHY DIET

A balanced diet comprising the right amounts of all nutrients is recommended. Processed and take-away foods should be kept to a minimum. At least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day are recommended.

People with PCOS often find that they do better with a diet that contains more lean meat and fish and lower quantities of red meat and fat. However, there is no one diet that is suitable for all people with this condition. Your doctor may be able to refer you for specialist dietician advice.

SUPPLEMENTS

If you are trying for a baby, please take folic acid 0.4 mg and Vitamin D 10 microgram daily. If your Body Mass Index (BMI) is greater than 30, your doctor may prescribe a higher dose of folic acid (5 mg daily).

A commercially available supplement called Inofolic, which is a combination of Myo Inositol and folic acid, has shown benefit in initial studies to improve the metabolic defect in PCOS and make menstrual cycles more regular. This is not a medicine and we cannot prescribe it, but you can obtain it online.

COSMETIC TREATMENTS

Facial hair removal creams, laser hair removal, or electrolysis can be used to control excess hair. You can find hair removal creams and products at most chemists. A prescription skin treatment (Eflornithine cream) can help slow down the growth rate of new hair in unwanted places.

PERIOD REGULARITY

If you miss your periods for 4 months consecutively, you must see your doctor to arrange further tests like an ultrasound scan. The doctor may give you medications to bring on the period. A minimum of 4 periods in a year are recommended to protect the health of the womb lining.

Weight loss and lifestyle measures can aid in making your periods more regular. If you are not trying to conceive, taking the oral contraceptive pill helps provide regular menstrual bleeds, while also being an effective contraceptive.

RISK OF DIABETES

Weight control through exercise and healthy eating is the best method for reducing the risk of diabetes. After the age of 40, your doctor may recommend an annual blood glucose test. This may need to be started earlier if the risk factors mentioned earlier are present.

CONTACT DETAILS



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<https://mft.nhs.uk/saint-marys/services/gynaecology/reproductive-medicine/>

FURTHER INFORMATION

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/polycystic-ovary-syndrome-pcos/>