

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) Information Leaflet

What is PCOS?

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) is a condition where the ovaries contain more developing eggs than is usual. However, most of these eggs never fully mature and are not released from the ovary.

The ovaries produce the female hormones oestrogen and progesterone, and a small amount of male hormone, testosterone.

In PCOS these hormones are often unbalanced. Another hormone, (insulin), which is responsible for keeping blood sugar at a normal level, becomes less effective in PCOS. These imbalances cause the classical symptoms of PCOS:

- Irregular, infrequent or no periods,
- Difficulty in getting pregnant,
- Weight gain, and difficulty in losing weight,
- Acne,
- Excessive body hair.

Not all women have all these symptoms, and each symptom can vary from mild to severe. Around 10 out of every 100 women have PCOS and most have no symptoms.

The cause of PCOS is genetic, and for this reason, it does tend to run in families.

Can PCOS be cured?

No. If you have been diagnosed with PCOS, you will always have it. Although the symptoms can become more obvious if your weight increases.

What Treatments Are Available?

Treatment varies from one woman to another. It depends on what, if any, aspect of PCOS the woman has concerns with. For example, there are treatments available to help with infertility, weight loss, excess hair, acne and irregular periods.

Your GP (General Practitioner) may also be able to offer support and advice about weight loss and healthy living.

Are There Any Long Term Health Risks?

Having PCOS can lead to an increased risk of diabetes, due to long term resistance to insulin. Gestational Diabetes (diabetes in pregnancy) is also an increased risk for women with PCOS. Testing for gestational diabetes should be performed between 24-28 weeks of pregnancy, with referral to a specialist obstetric diabetic service arranged if results are abnormal.

High blood pressure and high cholesterol levels; which can all lead to heart disease are risks of being very overweight and having hormone imbalances.

Having no or very infrequent periods can cause the lining of the womb to thicken, which can sometimes lead to cancer of the womb.

What Can Help Reduce The Long Term Health Risks?

Following a balanced diet, taking regular exercise and maintaining an appropriate weight are the main ways in which you can help yourself to reduce the long term health risks associated with PCOS.

- If you are overweight, losing weight will help. All the symptoms of PCOS can be greatly improved by weight loss.
- If you are not overweight, you should take care to keep your weight within the normal range for your height.
- Women with PCOS are more likely to develop Diabetes. One or two in every ten women with PCOS will go on to develop Diabetes in the future.
Diabetes occurs when the hormone insulin is unable to regulate the amount of sugar in your blood. This is called "insulin resistance."
Excess fat causes the body to produce more insulin, so being overweight greatly increases the risk of insulin resistance and diabetes.
- If you have few periods, or no periods at all, the lining of the womb may be more likely to thicken. Having regular periods prevents this happening. If the lining thickens, it can increase the risk of cancer in the womb. To reduce the risk, there is medication available to ensure you have a regular period.

If you are overweight, or have a family history of heart disease or diabetes, you may be offered regular (yearly) tests on the levels of cholesterol and fats in your blood, and on the levels of sugar in your urine and blood.

For more information about PCOS, speak to your Doctor or Nurse, or contact the Self Help group below:

Verity – The polycystic Ovaries Self Help Group
52-54 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8RT
www.verity-pcos.org.uk

Refs:

Patient information leaflet PCOS, Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists 2015.
www.rcog.org.uk/en/patient-leaflets

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists,
Green Top guideline no 33; Long-term consequences of PCOS, 2014
www.rcog.org.uk

For further information please contact staff at Gynaecology Outpatient Clinic at Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust on 0151 708 9988 Ext 4443

This leaflet can be made available in difference formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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Tel: 0151 708 9988
Ref: Gyn_2018-137
Issue Date: 08/06/2018
Review Date: 07/06/2021