

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)

General Information

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) is a disorder of the hormones made by the ovaries. Women with PCOS:

- have irregular menstrual periods or no menstrual periods
- may or may not have small ovarian cysts (fluid-filled sacs)
- have high levels of male hormones (androgens).

Symptoms of PCOS

You may have one or more of the following symptoms:

- irregular menstrual periods or no menstrual periods
- pelvic pain
- weight gain, especially around the waist
- infertility (inability to have children)
- increase hair growth on the face, chest, back, stomach, thumbs or toes
- patches of thickened or dark brown or black skin on the neck, arms, breasts or thighs
- skin tags, or tiny excess flaps of skin in the armpits or neck area
- thinning hair

- sleep apnea (breathing disorder)
- high cholesterol
- high blood pressure (hypertension)
- type 2 diabetes
- acne.

Causes of PCOS

The direct cause of PCOS is not clear.

PCOS has been found in women with weight problems. This may be related to how your body makes insulin. Insulin helps your body use sugar, starches, and other food for energy.

If you have PCOS and your body makes too much insulin, your ovaries may react by making too many male hormones (androgens). This can cause weight gain, increase hair growth or ovulation problems.

PCOS has also been commonly found in women who have a mother or sister with it.

How Your Doctor Will Decide If You Have PCOS

There is currently not a single test used to decide if you have PCOS. Your health care provider will take your complete medical history and perform a physical exam. He or she may also perform blood tests, an ultrasound exam, or both.

Treatment of PCOS

There is no cure yet for PCOS. Your health care provider may suggest the following treatments to help relieve symptoms of PCOS:

- birth control pills
- blood pressure medicine
- diabetes medicine
- fertility medicine
- medicine for increased hair growth or extra male hormones
- maintaining a healthy weight by exercising and eating a variety of healthy foods
- surgery.

**Information adapted from the U.S.
Department of Health and Human
Services Office of Women's Health**