

POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN SYNDROME (PCOS)

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) is a hormonal condition with a high level of androgens (male hormones) that cause hair loss, acne and hirsutism (facial hair).

However, the name assigned to the condition is somewhat confusing as it is not an ovarian condition. In fact, as recently as 2016, an expert panel from the NHI stated it as such and called for it to be renamed. The new name “metabolic reproductive syndrome” was proposed but is yet to become a widespread term for the condition

PCOS is a set of symptoms – it is not one thing in isolation. Ovaries are the victim of hormonal disruption.

The primary symptom of PCOS is the failure to ovulate regularly. It also accounts for high testosterone.

DIAGNOSIS

- Blood test that shows high testosterone or other male hormones like androstenedione or DHEA. Elevated LH/FSH ratio.
- Pelvic ultrasound - however, cysts are the sacs or follicles that contain the eggs, cysts are normal for ovaries. Every month your ovaries will look different on ultrasound so **PCOS cannot be diagnosed by ultrasound alone**

THE 4 TYPES OF PCOS (which may overlap)

- 1. Insulin resistant (test fasting insulin – not just fasting glucose)**
 - Insulin should be <60pmol/L (10mu/L)
 - Abnormal glucose tolerance
 - Elevated luteinising hormone (LH)
 - Possible overweight
 - Note: normal weight insulin resistance can occur following dieting / eating disorders
- 2. Pill Induced or Post-Pill PCOS**
 - Regular period before starting the Pill
 - May have acne
 - May have elevated LH
 - May have normal LH and high-normal prolactin
- 3. Inflammatory PCOS**
 - Inflammation impedes ovulation and disrupts hormone receptors

- May have symptoms such as recurring infections, joint pain, skin conditions, headaches
- Inflammation can be caused by prolonged stress, environmental toxins
- Intestinal permeability / leaky gut
- Inflammatory foods eg gluten, processed foods
- May have elevated DHEA or androstenedione
- May have Vit D deficiency
- May have elevated CRP (inflammatory marker in blood)
- May have thyroid antibodies
- May have gluten antibodies

4. Hidden-Cause PCOS

- Too much soy
- Thyroid disease
- Vegetarian diet (ovaries need zinc and often a veg diet is deficient in zinc)
- Iodine deficiency (ovaries need iodine)
- Artificial sweeteners – impair insulin signalling
- Too few carbs (hormonal system needs them)
- Too high fructose

CAUSES

- Lack of saturated fats. (Cholesterol makes hormones)
- Processed unsaturated fats or heated oils or industrial fats. These displace good healthy saturated fats and unprocessed unsaturated fats in the body.
- Soy intake - phytoestrogens create hormonal imbalances
- Little or no animal protein
- Congested liver due to drugs, medications, alcohol, sugar
- Candida or yeast infections
- Irregular bowel movements causing a reabsorption of toxins which affect liver metabolism of hormones and reabsorption of metabolised hormones.
- Toxicity /malabsorption and digestive imbalances
- Obesity, hyperinsulinaemia and insulin resistance.
- Malnutrition, eating disorders, fasting and excessive exercise
- Genitourinary infection
- Disorders of the endocrine system eg hypothyroid
- Physical, emotional, and mental stresses leading to inflammation
- Lack of exercise, poor lymphatic flow, and circulation to pelvic organs
- Imbalance in protein, carbs and fats per meals
- Nutritional deficiencies and lack of fluids
- Smoking, excess alcohol and caffeine
- History of taking the oral contraceptive pill

TREATMENT AIMS

The aim of treatment is to treat the underlying cause/s as well as provide symptomatic relief ie. address any of the following based on the individual

- Hormonal imbalance
- Toxicity: environmental exposure, heavy metals etc
- Digestion
- Liver function
- Hyperinsulinaemia and insulin resistance.
- Stress management
- Exercise to improve lymphatic flow and circulation to pelvic area
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Fluid intake
- Smoking, excess alcohol and caffeine
- Reduce weight

Lifestyle Recommendations:

- Increase exercise to increase circulation to pelvic region & increase oestrogen clearance
- Stress management is really important as stress triggers the release of adrenal hormones that in turn trigger the release of insulin – stores blood sugars as fat, food is not digested properly, etc. Consider relaxation tapes, breathing exercises, visualizations, yoga, meditation, tai chi, hot baths, massage, walks by sea/in nature, lie outside in sun for lunch break, sit/walk under trees, read book, creative outlet, dance, singing, exercise, counselling, aromatherapy, bush walking, Bach/Bush flowers fun & laughter!

If there is pain

- Hot baths with epsom salts & 5 –10 drops essential oils of lavender, ylang ylang, jasmine, chamomile.
- Hot water bottle – lay over reproductive organs when temperature is cold.
- Massage clary sage essential oil into stomach. Ensure dilution of essential oils in almond oil base.

Dietary Factors

- Small, frequent meals rather than large ones
- Whole food diet
- Avoid dairy
- Avoid gluten
- Avoid sugar
- Nutrient dense and anti-inflammatory
- Decrease exposure to xenoestrogens via chemicals, microwaved/hot plastic food containers, heated plastics, dental amalgams
- Hydrate well with water

- Herbal teas to support detoxification and elimination
- Low caffeine
- Avoid refined carbohydrates

Supplements and herbals by prescription include but not limited to:

ANDROGEN EXCESS	Licorice Peony
PAIN	Wild Yam Lemon Balm Cram Bark
HORMONAL MODULATOR (HPA Axis)	Chaste Tree
INFLAMMATION	Turmeric Pulsatilla Withania
LIVER SUPPORT	St Mary's Thistle Schisandra Globe Artichoke Dandelion Root
INSULIN SENSITIVITY	Goldenseal Phellodendron Barberry Oregon Grape
STRESS SUPPORT (ADAPTOGEN & ADRENAL RESTORATIVE)	Withania Licorice Rhodiola Rehmania
HERBS INDICATED FOR PCOS	False Unicorn Root Black cohosh Hops Peony Licorice
AMENORRHOEA (absence of period)	Pulsatilla Peony Rehmannia Chaste tress Dong quai Pulsitilla Lady's mantle
SUPPORT AND NORMALISE BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS	Gymnema Goat's Rue Fenugreek

	Cinnamon
DIGESTION	Goldenseal Slippery elm Licorice Angelica Gentian Dandelion leaf Ginger
IMPORTANT & RELEVANT NUTRIENTS <i>Food is medicine but there may be a need to supplement if deficient or due to intestinal permeability</i>	Magnesium Iodine B vitamins Vit D Chromium Zinc Probiotics Berberine Essential fatty acids Alpha lipoic acid Vit E

PATHOLOGY TESTING / INVESTIGATION – RECOMMENDED

- Metabolic syndrome profile (serum/plasma)
- Thyroid profile (endocrine function / abnormalities)
- Adrenal stress profile (saliva over 24hours)
- Female hormonal profile (saliva) – can be done over 28 days if no cycle
- Lipid profile

Please note that this information is a general guide and should not replace your individualised naturopathic consultation. Please do not self-diagnose or self-prescribe based on the information provided.

Rachel

x