

What is polycystic ovary syndrome?

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a hormonal condition which affects 12-21% of Australian women.

To be diagnosed with the syndrome called PCOS, you need to have at least two out of the following three features:

- many (poly) cysts on your ovaries (seen on an ultrasound); these follicles rarely grow to maturity or produce eggs that can be fertilised
- signs of excess male hormones (androgens)
 - acne, excess facial and body hair, male pattern hair loss
 - blood tests show raised male hormones
- menstrual periods come irregularly (e.g. more than 35 days apart)

What are the symptoms of PCOS?

PCOS affects women differently, with some having only mild symptoms, and others having severe symptoms. The more common symptoms of PCOS are:

- irregular periods
- acne
- excess facial and body hair or male pattern balding

These symptoms may be due to causes other than PCOS. It's important to see a doctor to discuss all your symptoms.

PCOS can also be associated with:

- reduced fertility due to irregular periods
- higher risk of type 2 diabetes and gestational diabetes
- higher chance of risk factors for heart disease such as high cholesterol
- higher risk of cancer of the endometrium (lining of the uterus)
- anxiety and depression
- disordered body image and eating disorders

The symptoms of PCOS tend to get worse with weight gain, and improve with weight loss - it is unclear if PCOS itself actually causes weight gain.

How is PCOS treated?

There are a variety of treatments for the different symptoms of PCOS. The type of treatment will depend on whether you are trying to become pregnant or not. You should talk to your doctor about what treatment is right for you.

The most important thing that all women who are diagnosed with PCOS can do is to follow a healthy lifestyle. A healthy diet as well as 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise every day is recommended for all women with PCOS. If you are overweight, even a small amount of weight loss can help to improve regular menstrual cycles and fertility. Leading a healthy lifestyle is important for all women diagnosed with PCOS.

For more information

Family Planning NSW Talkline –

www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline or 1300 658 886

National Relay Service (for deaf people) –

13 36 77

TIS National's interpreting service –

131 450

Visit your nearest Family Planning NSW clinic –

www.fpnsw.org.au/clinics

Jean Hailes –

www.managingpcos.org.au