

## Fact Sheet

# Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)



### What is PCOS?

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a hormonal condition which affects 12-21% of Australian women. The name comes from the appearance on an ultrasound scan of 'polycystic' ovaries, which means that both the ovaries have at least 12 follicles seen in them (the follicles can appear to look like small cysts). However, just having polycystic ovaries alone is not enough to give the diagnosis of polycystic ovary syndrome. To be diagnosed with PCOS, you need to have at least two out of the three things listed below:

1. Polycystic ovaries seen on ultrasound scan
2. Clinical and/or biochemical signs of excess male hormone levels
  - a. Clinical signs: acne, excess facial and/or body hair, male pattern hair loss
  - b. Biochemical signs: blood tests showing raised testosterone levels and/or other male hormones found in the blood
3. Infrequent or absent ovulation (release of an egg), indicated by irregular periods (menstrual cycle shorter than 21 days or longer than 35 days)

### What are the symptoms/signs?

PCOS affects women differently, with some having only mild symptoms, and others being affected quite severely. Some of the features of PCOS are listed below, but not all of these symptoms are present in every woman with PCOS:

- irregular periods
- acne
- excess facial and/or body hair
- male pattern balding
- anxiety and depression
- disordered body image and eating disorders
- reduced fertility
- increased risk of type 2 diabetes, and gestational diabetes
- increased risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as high cholesterol levels

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

The symptoms of PCOS get worse with weight gain, and improve with weight loss, but it is unclear as to whether PCOS itself actually causes weight gain.

### What treatment is available?

There is a variety of different possible treatments for the different symptoms of PCOS. Specific treatments are available for the issues listed above, and you should talk to your doctor about what treatment is appropriate for you. The most important thing that all women who are diagnosed with PCOS should do is to follow a healthy lifestyle. A healthy diet in combination with 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise every day is recommended for all women with PCOS. If you are overweight, even a small reduction in your weight (eg. 5-10%) can help significantly with improving regular menstrual cycles and fertility. If your weight is in the healthy range, it is important to avoid weight gain, so leading a healthy lifestyle is still important.

### For further information

- Contact the Family Planning NSW Talkline on 1300 658 886 or go to [www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline](http://www.fpnsw.org.au/talkline)
- NRS (for deaf) 133 677
- Jean Hailes is a not-for-profit organisation providing a range of health services for Australian women. They have a website about PCOS with lots of information and factsheets. Please visit <http://www.managingpcos.org.au/>.

*The information in this Factsheet has been provided for educational purposes only. Family Planning NSW has taken every care to ensure that the information is accurate and up-to-date at the time of publication. Individuals concerned about any personal reproductive or sexual health issue are encouraged to seek advice and assistance from their health care provider or visit a Family Planning clinic.*

[www.fpnsw.org.au](http://www.fpnsw.org.au) | [talkline 1300 658 886](tel:1300658886) | [bookshop](#)

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