



## Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

### What is PCOS?

PCOS is a common hormonal imbalance that happens in some people. Healthcare professionals don't know why certain people have this condition but it can run in families. In PCOS, specific hormones called androgens are higher than normal. There are many androgen hormones, and testosterone is one of them. Typically, the ovaries release an egg (ovulate) about once a month. In those with PCOS, high androgen hormone levels get in the way of regular release of eggs and can lead to acne and excess body hair (for example, on your face) as well as changes in periods. Sometimes healthcare professionals are not sure if a patient has PCOS. If that is the case, your healthcare professional can still treat your symptoms.

### What are the symptoms of PCOS?

Teens with PCOS usually have problems with their periods – for example having periods infrequently, irregularly, or having heavy bleeding. Also, teens with PCOS may have acne, hair loss, and excessive facial or body hair. Many teens with PCOS are overweight. Some teens have feelings of sadness or depression; be sure to tell your healthcare professional if you do.

### Does PCOS mean that I have large cysts on my ovaries?

No! Teens with PCOS may have normal looking ovaries, slightly enlarged ovaries, or many follicles in their ovaries (which give the ovary a “cystic” appearance). PCOS does not cause large cysts in the ovaries.

### How will my healthcare professional diagnose PCOS?

Your healthcare professional will perform a careful physical exam to look for signs of high androgens (such as acne or body hair) and get a detailed history of periods and other symptoms. Your healthcare professional will most likely order some blood tests to help with the diagnosis. Sometimes, healthcare professionals use an ultrasound to help them understand your body better.

### How is PCOS treated?

For teens who are overweight, healthcare professionals often recommend exercise and weight loss or not gaining any more weight. Weight loss can sometimes restore regular periods. Exercise and weight loss can also be especially helpful for teens who have a darkening of the skin on their necks and armpits called acanthosis nigricans. This type of skin change is seen when a hormone called insulin is too high. Having PCOS may put you at risk for problems related to insulin resistance and diabetes. Exercise and weight loss or avoiding weight gain can reduce your risk of developing diabetes.

Many of the symptoms of PCOS may be treated by using birth control pills to rebalance the body's hormones. This treatment helps periods be more regular and helps control acne and facial or body hair problems by lowering testosterone made by the ovaries. Your healthcare professional can treat acne with a cream, lotion or pill, and may talk with you about a pill for facial or body hair problems. Sometimes healthcare professionals use other medications for patients with diabetes, high insulin, or significant excess hair.

**After it is treated, will PCOS come back?  
Will I have problems later?**

Once on treatment, symptoms of PCOS are generally well controlled. Some teens reverse the symptoms with weight loss. However, teens who have PCOS may be at increased risk for having some additional problems later on in life: difficulty getting pregnant and maintaining a healthy pregnancy, uterine cancer, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and heart disease. Even though some patients with PCOS take longer or need help to become pregnant, you should always use birth control if you are having sex and don't want to become pregnant. Your healthcare professional can talk with you more about this, so please ask if you have questions.

**Is body hair bad for me?**

Some teens with PCOS notice hair on their face, abdomen, chest or other parts of their body. This hair is not dangerous. Some people wish to remove or reduce body hair, and others do not. Many people have hair in different parts of their bodies. You do not have to remove body hair if you do not want to. You should let your healthcare provider know if you have any concerns about your body hair.