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Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

Overview

What is polycystic ovary syndrome?

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a condition that occurs when an imbalance of hormone levels in a woman's body causes cysts (say: "sists") to form in the ovaries. The cysts are like tiny, fluid-filled balloons.

Women can develop PCOS during their teenage or childbearing years.

Symptoms

What are the symptoms of PCOS?

Usually, women who have PCOS have irregular, infrequent or no menstrual periods. They may also have trouble getting pregnant. Some women who have PCOS do not experience any symptoms.

Other signs and symptoms of PCOS may include:

- Acne
- Overweight and obesity
- Excessive hair growth on the face, nipple area, chest, lower abdomen and thighs

Women who have PCOS are more likely to have type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Causes & Risk Factors

What causes PCOS?

Doctors do not know what causes PCOS. If you have PCOS, you may have a problem with the way your body uses blood sugar (glucose). Because of this problem, the hormone levels that control your ovaries and menstrual periods can become abnormal.

Diagnosis & Tests

How can my doctor tell that I have PCOS?

Your doctor will look for the signs of PCOS. He or she will give you a full physical examination, which will most likely include a pelvic exam. Blood tests that measure your hormone levels can also help. An ultrasound exam can show if you have cysts on your ovaries.

Treatment

How is PCOS treated?

Treatment for PCOS focuses on managing the symptoms. You might need to lose weight. Eating healthy and getting plenty of exercise can help manage PCOS. Medicine can help regulate your menstrual cycle and reduce abnormal hair growth and acne. If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, those conditions also need treatment. If you want to have a baby, there are medicines that may help you get pregnant.

Complications

Does PCOS cause long-term problems?

If you have PCOS, you are more likely to develop high blood pressure, high cholesterol or type 2 diabetes. This means you have a greater risk for strokes and heart attacks.

Problems with menstrual periods may also cause women who have PCOS to be infertile (unable to get pregnant). They may also have a higher risk for cancer of the uterus or breast.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What is the likely cause of my polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)?
- Am I at risk for other health problems?
- I'd like to get pregnant. How does PCOS affect my chances?
- What lifestyle changes should I make at home to help relieve my symptoms?
- What kind of diet will help me regulate my blood sugar levels?
- What are my treatment options? What treatment do you recommend for me?

Source

[Polycystic Ovary Syndrome: It's Not Just Infertility](http://www.aafp.org/afp/20000901/1079.html) by MH Hunter, MD, and JJ Sterrett, PHARM.D (*American Family Physician* September 01, 2000, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20000901/1079.html>)

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