

MANAGING YOUR POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

What Is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome?

Polycystic Ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a condition in which ovaries have many cysts (fluid-filled sacs). It's also called Stein-Leventhal syndrome. PCOS is a disorder related to the body's hormones. For example, the pituitary gland, which is at the base of the brain, makes hormones that tell the body how to work. One of these hormones tells the ovary when to release an egg. When the pituitary gland is overactive and makes too much hormone, ovaries get cysts.

PCOS usually starts in women younger than 30 and affects 5% to 10% of women.

What Causes Polycystic Ovary Syndrome?

The cause of changes in hormone levels isn't clear. One possibility is genetic reasons that cause PCOS in overweight or obese women.

What Are the Symptoms of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome?

The most common symptom is irregular periods. They occur a few times a year, sometimes only once a year, and sometimes not at all. Bleeding can be very light or very heavy. Other symptoms include acne; hair loss on the head; too much hair on the face (can be thick and dark), chest, or stomach; high cholesterol levels; high blood pressure; deep voice; oily skin; dark rash on the neck, underarm, or groin; trouble getting pregnant (infertility); depression; and weight gain.

How Is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome Diagnosed?

The health care provider will take a medical history, do a physical and pelvic examination, and order blood tests to measure hormone levels and rule out other illnesses. Blood pressure and blood glucose and cholesterol levels will be measured. The health care provider will also order

ultrasonography of the ovaries to see how many cysts they have. The health care provider may suggest a visit to a gynecologist (a health care provider who specializes in female reproductive health) and to an endocrinologist (a specialist in hormone disorders).

How Is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome Treated?

Treatment depends on how severe symptoms are and if pregnancy is wanted. Overweight women will need to diet and exercise. Weight loss can help many women with PCOS.

Medicine can be given to make periods more regular, control other symptoms, and help in becoming pregnant. Surgery (laparoscopic ovarian wedge resection) is sometimes performed to decrease hormone release from the ovaries.

High blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol, if present, should also be treated.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

- ✓ **DO** follow your doctor's directions and take your medicine.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider about your medicines, including prescription and nonprescription drugs.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider if you're pregnant or trying to have a baby.
- ✓ **DO** see your health care provider regularly. Get a pelvic examination every year.
- ✓ **DO** try to lose weight by eating a healthy diet and exercising.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider right away or go to the emergency room if you have very heavy vaginal bleeding or severe stomach pain.
- ⊗ **DON'T** stop taking your medicine just because you feel better.

⊗ **DON'T** abuse alcohol.

⊗ **DON'T** use any other medicines, including herbal supplements, without asking your health care provider first.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome Association: Tel: (877) 755-7276; Website: <http://www.pcosupport.org>
- The Endocrine Society: Tel: (888) 363-6274; Website: <http://www.endo-society.org>

Copyright © 2021 by Elsevier, Inc.