

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a hormone imbalance in women that can make it difficult to become pregnant and cause problems with your periods. A majority of women with PCOS grow small cysts on their ovaries that are not harmful, but lead to imbalances in hormones.

Early diagnosis and treatment are key to controlling symptoms and preventing long-term associated problems such as diabetes and heart disease.

Chemical messengers that trigger different processes, such as energy production and growth, are called hormones. With PCOS, these hormones may get out of balance, and one hormone change triggers another, which can then change another.

For example, your body could have a problem using insulin well, which is called insulin resistance. When this occurs, blood sugar levels go up. Over time, this increases your risk of diabetes.

While the cause of PCOS is not completely understood, some believe that genetics may be a factor. PCOS tends to run in families, so your chance of having it increases if other women in your family have been diagnosed, have symptoms or have diabetes. PCOS can be inherited from either your mother's or father's side.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms of PCOS can be mild at first. Over time, the number or severity of symptoms can increase. However, this varies among individuals.

The most common symptoms are:

- Weight gain
- Extra hair on the face or body; often, thicker and darker facial hair and more hair on the chest, belly and back
- Thinning hair on the scalp
- Irregular periods (often, fewer than nine a year); no periods or very heavy bleeding
- Fertility problems
- Depression

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

To diagnose PCOS, the provider will:

- Ask questions about your past medical history, current symptoms and menstrual cycles.
- Perform a physical exam to check for signs of high blood pressure, extra body hair and height/weight to see if you have a healthy body mass index (BMI).
- Request lab tests to check your insulin, blood sugar and other hormone levels, which can help rule out thyroid and other gland problems.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

Treatments for PCOS can include healthy diet, exercise and weight loss. Some women may also benefit from hormonal regulation and the use of metformin to treat insulin resistance and assist with the treatment of fertility issues.

Burgess, P., MD. (2014, March 26). Webmd.com. Retrieved April 26, 2016, from www.webmd.com/women/tc/polycystic-ovary-syndrome-pcos-credits