

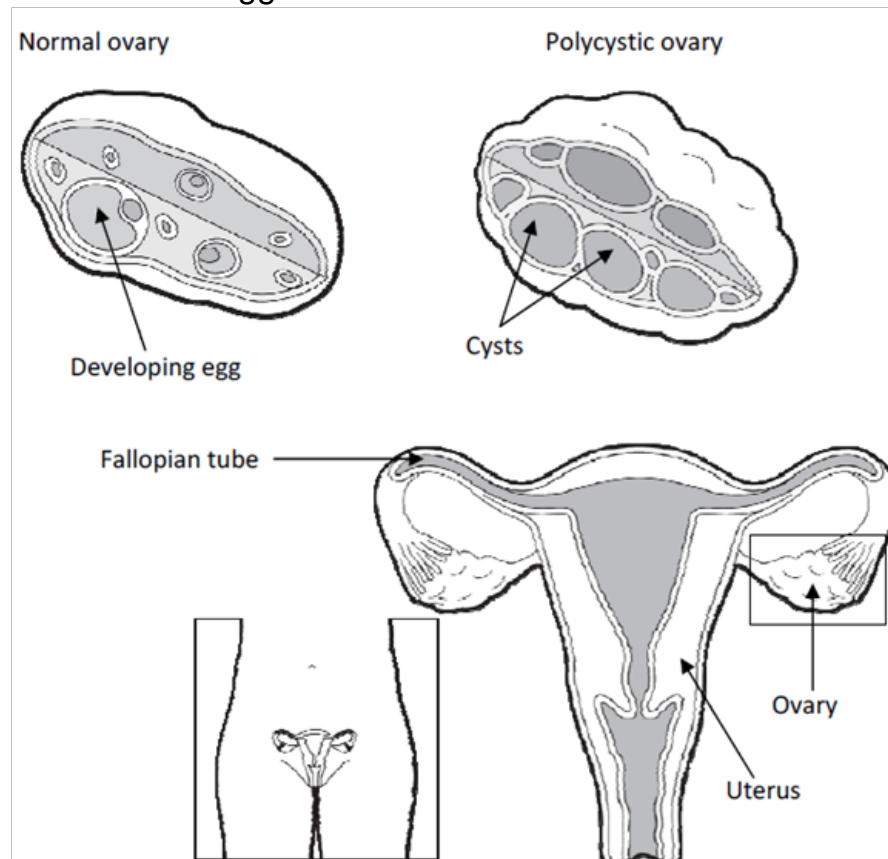
This information answers some common questions about PCOS and its treatment. You have an important part in your treatment. **You can improve PCOS, your fertility and overall health by making healthy lifestyle choices.**

What is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome?

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome is the most common hormone disorder in women. It affects about 1 in 10 women of reproductive age. PCOS is also a common cause of infertility which is the inability to become pregnant.

For someone without PCOS, eggs grow in small sacs called follicles which are inside the ovaries. A follicle matures and releases an egg into the fallopian tube once a month. This is called ovulation.

When you have PCOS, the ovaries are enlarged and the follicles that are inside do not develop properly and do not release the egg. The follicles form fluid-filled cysts instead of normal eggs.



What causes PCOS?

The exact cause of PCOS is not known. Some of the reasons why you may have developed PCOS include:

- You inherited it from a parent.
- You may not have enough of the hormone that helps the ovaries work properly, called Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH).
- The hormones FSH and estrogen are not working properly.
- Insulin, the hormone that helps the body use sugar, is not working properly.

What are the signs and symptoms of PCOS?

You may:

- Have problems with monthly periods (no periods, irregular periods or very heavy bleeding).
- Have difficulty getting pregnant because you do not ovulate regularly.
- Have abnormal growth of body hair (called hirsutism), baldness and/or acne.
- Have dark patches of skin called 'acanthosis nigricans'.
- Be overweight/obese – hormonal changes in PCOS make weight gain easy.

What are the health risks of PCOS?

When you have PCOS, you have a higher risk for developing:

- Pregnancy complications such as gestational diabetes, pre-term delivery, and miscarriage.
- Diabetes due to changes in insulin action.

Women with PCOS often have high levels of insulin, called insulin resistance. Insulin is the hormone that transports glucose (a form of fuel in our bodies) into our cells so that it can be used for energy. Your body releases insulin into your bloodstream after each time you eat.

However, when you have PCOS, your cells don't respond to insulin properly. As a result, your body makes more insulin, which causes high levels in your blood. If left untreated, this can cause high blood sugar and diabetes.

You also have a higher risk of developing:

- Cancer of the uterus due to high levels of estrogen.
- Hypothyroidism (an underactive thyroid gland, which controls metabolism).
- Heart disease due to increased risk factors like high blood pressure and cholesterol.

To avoid these health risks, it is important to get treatment from a health care professional.

Medical tests to confirm the diagnosis of PCOS:

- **Physical exam:** your blood pressure and pelvis will be checked to see if your ovaries are enlarged.
- **Pelvic ultrasound:** this may show enlarged ovaries with small cysts.
- **Blood Tests:** different tests may be done to see if you have PCOS.

Results that mean you may have PCOs include:

- high testosterone level
- high prolactin, which can play a role in reducing fertility
- high or low thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH)
- high levels of insulin in the blood
- high cholesterol levels in the blood

How is PCOS treated?

Treatment of PCOS can improve fertility and overall health. Your treatment may include:

- Healthy lifestyle choices, to encourage weight loss.
- Medications to adjust the amount of estrogen and/or other hormones.
- Medications to help control insulin such as Metformin.

How is infertility related to PCOS treated?

To improve fertility, medications to help with ovulation may be prescribed. This is called ovulation induction (OI).

Ovulation induction may include:

- Daily injections of a Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH).
- An injection of Human Chorionic Gonadotropin, (HcG) to help trigger ovulation.
- Blood tests to check estrogen levels.
- Ultrasound scans to check follicle development.

Healthy lifestyle choices can help manage PCOS

Aim for a healthy weight

Weight loss can improve fertility, and help control cholesterol and insulin levels. Research shows that losing as little as 5% body weight can increase fertility by 40%. An example is losing 10 pounds if you weigh 200 pounds. Being more active and making healthy food choices can help you lose weight.

Be more active

An active lifestyle with regular exercise can help treat PCOS as well as reduce the risk for other chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease. For more details on physical activity, see handout 'Healthy Living with PCOS'.

Make healthy food choices

Eating well is a very important part of managing PCOS and reducing risks for all types of chronic disease. For details on healthy eating with PCOS, see the handout 'Healthy Living with PCOS'.