

What is PCOS ?

Polycystic ovary syndrome(PCOS) is one of the most common female endocrine disorder affecting approximately 5%-10% of women of reproductive age(12-45 year old) and is thought to be one of the leading causes of female infertility.

What causes PCOS?

The cause of PCOS is unknown. But most experts think that several factors, including genetics could play a role. Women with PCOS are more likely to have a mother or sister with PCOS. A main underlying problem with PCOS is a hormonal imbalance. In women with PCOS, the ovaries make more androgens than normal. High levels of these hormones affect the development and release of eggs during ovulation.

How many women have PCOS?

Between 10 to 20% women of childbearing age have PCOS. As many as 5 million women in the United States may be affected. It can occur in girls as young as 11 years old.

Common symptoms of PCOS include

- Oligomenorrhea, Amenorrhea-irregular, few or absent menstrual periods. Few can have very heavy period as well.
- Infertility, generally resulting from lack of ovulation.
- Hirsutism- excessive mild symptoms of hyperandrogenism, such as acne hypermenorrhea, are frequent in adolescent girls and are often associated with irregular menstrual cycles. In most instances, these symptoms are transient and only reflect the immaturity of the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis during the first years following menarche.

Why do girls with PCOS have trouble with their menstrual cycle and fertility?

In girls with PCOS, the ovary doesn't make all of the hormones it needs for an egg to fully mature. The follicles may start to grow and build up fluid but ovulation does not occur. Instead, some follicle may remain as cysts. For these reasons, ovulation does not occur and the hormone progesterone is not made. Without progesterone, a woman's menstrual cycle is irregular or absent. Plus, the ovaries make male hormones, which also prevent ovulation.

Women with PCOS appear to have higher rates of:

- Miscarriage
- Gestational diabetes
- Premature delivery
- Pregnancy-induced high blood pressure(preeclampsia)

Can PCOS be treated?

A modern and more enlighten approach to PCOS management is as follows:

Diet control: Try to lose weight if you are overweight, especially if you have excess fat around the waist.

Low carbohydrate, low fat and high protein diet is recommended. Don't stint on fruit and vegetables.

Can PCOS be treated with herbal supplements? Are low dose OC pills effective?

Some women with PCOS have found relief from their symptoms through alternative therapies, such as herbs, acupuncture, homeopathic remedies and other alternative approaches. In today's world, the modern low dose contraceptive pills have good effect and are used frequently. You may need to consult your doctor before using them.

Is it true that PCOS can have long - term effects later in life?

PCOS if uncontrolled can lead to diabetes, increased cholesterol levels and heart disease later in life. The risks of endometrial cancer and breast cancer also increase.