



Lancashire
Gynaecologist
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Polycystic Ovarian
Syndrome (PCOS)

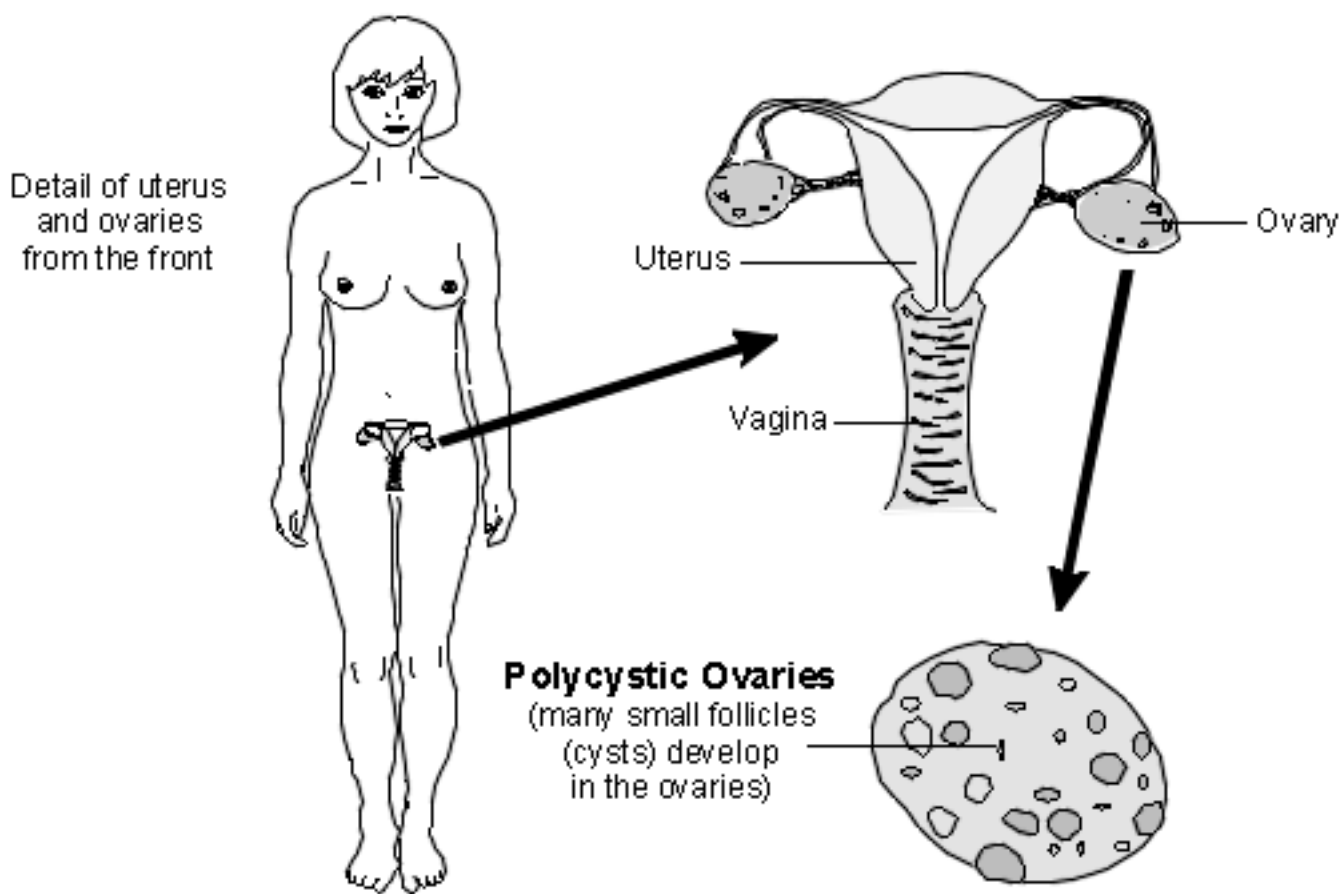
Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) is a condition affecting 1 in 10 women in the UK. In this blog, we outline the signs, symptoms together with their impact on a woman's overall health and fertility.

What is PCOS?

PCOS is an endocrine disorder that affects the female reproductive organs – the ovaries. The cause of PCOS is unknown but endocrine disorders are linked to abnormal hormone levels in the body, including high levels of insulin.

Polycystic ovaries contain many small 'cysts' (double the number of normal ovaries), usually less than 8 millimetres each, located just below the surface of the ovaries. Despite the name, these aren't cysts, but follicles that have not matured to be ovulated. The follicles are underdeveloped sacs in which eggs develop. In PCOS, these sacs are often unable to release an egg, which means ovulation does not take place.

It is thought that PCOS runs in families and although there is no cure for PCOS, the symptoms can be treated.



What are the symptoms of PCOS?

Symptoms vary from mild to severe and can include:

- irregular periods, or no periods
- increased facial or body hair (hirsutism)
- thinning hair on your head
- being overweight, experiencing a rapid increase in weight or having difficulty losing weight
- oily skin, acne particularly around the jawline
- difficulty becoming pregnant (reduced fertility)
- tiredness
- depression and psychological problems can also result from having PCOS



PCOS is also associated with an increased risk of developing health problems in later life, such as type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol levels. PCOS can also cause women to struggle with depression and with their mental health.

Not everyone has the same symptoms or all of them, but if you have just two, it's likely you have PCOS.

PCOS and your hormones

Although the exact cause of PCOS is unknown, it is thought to be caused by a hormone and metabolic (the chemical reactions in the body's cells that change food into energy) imbalance in the body.

PCOS is associated with high levels of androgens, the "male" hormones in the body, including testosterone which is produced in small amounts by the ovaries in all women. Women with PCOS have slightly higher than normal testosterone levels, and this is associated with many of the symptoms of the condition, like unwanted facial hair and thinning head hair.



PCOS and Insulin Resistance

PCOS can make it harder for the body to respond to insulin, the hormone that controls glucose levels in the blood. To try to prevent the glucose levels from becoming higher, the body produces even more insulin. This can lead to weight gain, irregular periods, fertility problems and higher testosterone levels.

A drug called metformin is often used to correct insulin resistance, which may be present with PCOS. This drug is used to treat type 2 diabetes and can reduce the risk of it developing in women with PCOS. Metformin can also stimulate egg production and will sometimes be used as part of fertility treatment.

PCOS and pregnancy

PCOS can make conception more difficult, usually because an egg is not being released monthly. To stimulate egg release, it might be necessary to prescribe fertility drugs. One of the most commonly prescribed fertility drugs is Clomifene.

As with any treatment, much depends on the individual and her overall health, so you should always seek advice from a fertility expert first.

PCOS and lifestyle management

Lifestyle changes are as effective as medications, and should always be tried first, or in combination with any medicines that are prescribed. Many women manage their PCOS symptoms and long-term health risks without medical intervention by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, losing weight and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

PCOS and a healthy diet

Having a healthy diet and exercising regularly can significantly help your PCOS symptoms. It can also reduce your chances of developing other health conditions, including type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol. When insulin resistance is present developing diabetes in later life is a risk.

Try to eat lots of fruit and vegetables, more fibre, stay hydrated, and eat oily fish reduce meat and dairy products, avoid sugary food and drink and avoid or limit alcohol.

Inositol is a commercially available dietary supplement that has been shown to benefit some women.



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Talk to the Lancashire Gynaecologist

The exact cause of PCOS is not precisely understood. There may be several reasons for the condition, which would explain why different women can present with varying symptom combinations. It is important to seek a diagnosis which will be given if you have any two of the following:

- irregular, infrequent periods or no periods at all
- an increase in facial or body hair and/or blood tests that show higher testosterone levels than normal
- an ultrasound scan that shows polycystic ovaries.

For anyone who has PCOS or thinks they may have it, you should learn more about the options for treatment and care.

Mr Eric Mutema, The Lancashire Gynaecologist lead consultant, has wide-ranging gynaecological knowledge and is a leading expert in female reproductive health. He offers general obstetrics and gynaecology patient care, but it also treats specific conditions, including PCOS.

He offers his patients individual attention, an empathetic, compassionate approach and patient-centred care. This includes a full consultation that will take your overall health into account and subsequent treatments will be tailored to meet the needs of the individual woman. So please don't wait and put off seeking treatment if you have any concerns or some of the symptoms described above. Get in touch, we are here to help you.



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