

POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a condition that causes irregular menstrual bleeding. It is also known as Stein-Leventhal syndrome or polycystic ovary disease (PCOD). It affects an estimated 6%–10% of all women, but most do not even know they have it. It is, however, one of the leading causes of infertility among women.

Many women with PCOS also have trouble with excessive weight gain (particularly around the mid-section), facial hair growth, and acne, which are caused by an imbalance of the hormones that regulate the menstrual cycle. We do not fully understand why some women develop PCOS, but we do know that things such as excessive weight gain, stress, and high blood levels of insulin increase the risk of developing this condition.

The ovaries in PCOS have multiple small cysts, which are follicles that matured but, because of the abnormal hormone levels, were never released. These can be seen on ultrasound, but ultrasound alone will not make the diagnosis; some women have these cysts on their ovaries but do not have PCOS.

The diagnosis of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome is made by **blood tests**. These tests also help your doctor to be sure that your ovaries are the only organs in your body that are not working right—that is, that your brain, thyroid gland, pituitary gland, and adrenal glands are all working normally.

The **treatment** of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome starts with regulating your period. Irregular or infrequent periods over a long period of time can lead to an increased risk of endometrial cancer (cancer of the lining of the uterus). If you have not bled in several months, your doctor will try to get things flowing again by giving you a medicine called **Provera**. This medicine contains the hormone—**Progesterone**—that your body is supposed to make just before you get a menstrual period each month. You will have to take the medicine by mouth (1 tablet each day for 5 days). About 7 to 10 days after the last pill, you should get a menstrual period.

If your menstrual period does not start, you may need further testing. If you have been bleeding for a long time, your doctor will try to stop your bleeding by giving you birth control pills. Birth control pills contain the hormones **estrogen** and progesterone, which your body is supposed to make just before your menstrual period stops each month. Depending on how heavily you are bleeding, you will have to take 1 to 3 tablets each day for 2 to 3 weeks. If you do not stop bleeding, you may need further testing.

The next goal is to keep menstruating regularly. This helps prevent acne and facial hair growth. The best way to be sure that a woman with PCOS has regular menstrual periods is for her to take a birth control pill every day. Losing weight is also very important. Although it is not easy to lose weight, it is one of the few things a woman can do to treat PCOS... so try!!!

If you have questions or just want to talk about PCOS

**Please call:
The Child and Adolescent Gynecology Clinic at The Children's Hospital
303-764-4470**