

PCOS - Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome

by B. Veeren Chithriki, MD

PCOS stands for Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome. This sounds ominous but is actually a very common disorder affecting 1:20 women. Like many conditions, there are variations in presentation and severity.

Symptoms that make us suspect PCOS include things such as irregular menstrual cycles, prolonged bleeding, excessive hair growth, acne, difficulty getting pregnant and weight gain, especially centrally. The cause of PCOS is unknown but may be genetic predispositions toward this disorder. The underlying problem is excessive glucose and insulin metabolism leading to high levels of the male growth hormone production of testosterone. This results in a problem with not ovulating which can lead to these irregular cycles sometimes occurring every 2 to 3 months and occasionally even longer than this. These cycles can be erratic, heavy and long. The high insulin levels also have been associated with developing diabetes either in pregnancy or later on in life.

Diagnosis can be difficult and misdiagnosis is common. At times, the symptoms can be attributed to stress. With a high degree of suspicion by your provider, laboratory test and ultrasounds can confirm the diagnosis.

The good news is that PCOS can be treated. Lifestyle changes to include a low calorie, low carbohydrate diet along with exercise can greatly help. More bothersome symptoms can be treated with such agents as birth control pills or the injectable hormone Depoprovera . If infertility is an issue, then insulin lowering medication such as Metformin and/or Clomid, can be useful to help increase the fertility rates. And lastly, if excessive hair growth occurs, then birth control pills as well as anti-androgen medications can be beneficial in slowing this process.

With early accurate diagnosis, patient education, and an individualized treatment plan, the outcome from PCOS can be very good.

B. Veeren Chithriki, MD