

# Creation

**Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)** seems to be becoming one of the most common female health complaints seen within my practice. In fact it is the most common endocrine disorder in women of reproductive age. PCOS is accompanied by a variety of different health issues, many of which directly impact fertility. **So what are the Symptoms?** Here is a list of some of the symptoms although of course it is possible to be “asymptomatic”

Weight gain	Increased facial and body hair (hirsutism)	Irregular or absent menstruation	Blood sugar imbalances	Elevated levels of testosterone/androgens
Obesity	Excessive or heavy menstrual bleeding	Abnormal mid cycle bleeding	Mood disorders	Anovulation (lack of ovulation)
Balding	History of ovarian cysts	Recurrent miscarriage	Polycystic ovaries	Acanthosis nigricans (hyper pigmentation of the skin)
Insulin Resistancy/Type II diabetes	Acne	Sub-clinical thyroid	High levels of Luteinizing hormones	Low levels of progesterone

**What Causes PCOS?** - Orthodox doctors are unsure of what causes PCOS, but I thought that there may be a genetic link, possible abnormal fetal development and inflammatory response. I suspect that the PCOS tendency may start in-vitro due to the Western style diet and our “unconscious sugar and grain addiction”. It is well established that PCOS is affected by diet, lifestyle and exposure to certain environmental toxins so from a naturopathic standpoint it makes sense that you can develop a tendency to PCOS in vitro.

**So What Exactly Is PCOS?** Within each menstrual cycle follicles grow on the ovaries. Within these follicles eggs develop - eventually stimulating ovulation as an egg matures, and then releases into the fallopian tubes ready for fertilization or degeneration. However, in the case of PCO (polycystic ovaries) the ovaries are larger than normal, immature and “sticky”. They clump together and can cause a hormonal imbalance which can lead to PCO or PCOS, poor endocrine function, excessive levels of estrogen and eventually endometrial hyperplasia, endometriosis or fertility issues.

## How Does it Affect Fertility and Health?

Menstrual Cycle irregularities	Hormonal disturbances affect ovulation and fertilisation	Possible increased risk for Endometrial and Breast Cancer due to unopposed oestrogen	Infertility	Cardiovascular Disease	Insulin Resistance due to low grade inflammation causing chronic inflammatory response
Diabetes (Type II)	Gestational Diabetes	Increased risk of miscarriage			

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**How is PCOS Diagnosed?** Ultrasound, **Pituitary and Ovarian Hormone serum levels including** Luteinizing Hormone (LH), Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH), oestradiol, progesterone, testosterone, prolactin, free testosterone, 17-hydroxyprogesterone, Sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG), Dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate (DHEA-S). Health practitioners may also test Endometrial Biopsy, Glucose Tolerance Test, Thyroid Panel and Blood Lipid Profile

## **Medical Options for PCOS:**

**Choices of treatment will depend on your GP and also whether you are trying to conceive or wanting to become pregnant.**

**Prescriptive medicine often includes: Oral Contraceptives if you are not trying to start a family.**

**Clomid** is commonly used for women with PCOS to hyperstimulate the ovaries to ovulate.

**Laparoscopic ovarian diathermy or follicle drilling** - used to sensitise the ovaries to the production of FSH and encourage ovulation.

**Metformin** - commonly prescribed for women with PCOS, even if they are not insulin resistant or have any signs of type 2 diabetes..

There are a variety of **other medications** prescribed depending on the symptoms of PCOS. There are medications for hirsutism or alopecia, weight gain and more. Your doctor can provide you with specific information on medications.

## **Naturopathic Alternatives: Learn to Eat Well and Change your Lifestyle!**

**Please see the Blood Sugar Diet within my website and the Fertility Diet.**

### **In a nutshell:**

**Eat Regularly** – 3 meals per day using a Blood Sugar Diet

**Choose Fresh Seasonal Food** – non packaged food when possible, low glycaemic\* and in their natural state – whole grains, fibre rich food, plenty of fresh vegetables and lean protein.

**Drink Water** – yes, plain water, about 1.5-2litres daily

**Eat Fibre** - this helps with removing excess oestrogen from the body and encourages detoxification. Examples are ground linseeds, broccoli, celery, whole grains, and dark leafy greens.-

**Quit the Stimulants!** - this includes all forms of caffeine. A study from Fertility and Sterility shows that drinking just two cups of coffee a day boosts levels of oestradiol, a natural estrogen. Women who drink 4-5 cups of coffee a day produce 70% more estrogen in the follicular phase of the menstrual cycle .

**Exercise** – moderate exercise daily, 10,000 steps daily, dancing, yoga, pilates, swimming – at least 5 days per week for 30 minutes. Exercise helps PCOS by improving the metabolic rate. Both aerobic and resistance exercises are good. Researchers found that participants of resistance exercises showed better improvement in insulin sensitivity than with aerobic exercise alone.

### **Sleep well**

**Manage your stress levels and remain positive**

\*Low glycaemic index foods are carbohydrates that break down slowly in the body, and don't cause such a dramatic spike and drop in insulin levels. Avoid foods that have a high glycemic index such as stimulants, alcohol, coffee, sugar, white potatoes, jams, white bread products, pasta.

**A word about supplementation. As a naturopathic nutritional therapist I strongly believe that we are all different and therefore have individual supplementation requirements. However, the following may be useful.**

**Essential fatty acids** - Eating essential fatty acids (EFA's) helps you to lose weight, produce balanced hormones, and creates a healthy environment for conception. This includes fish oils high in DHA and Evening Primrose Oil high in GLA

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**Chromium** - trace mineral enhances the action of insulin. Some studies have shown supplementing with chromium may improve blood sugar control. Foods that are high in chromium are onions, tomatoes, oysters, whole grains, bran cereals. Most foods contain little chromium, so supplementation may be need to be considered.

**Calcium and V Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum spp.*)** - A pilot study published in 2007 by *Fertility and Sterility* showed cinnamon to greatly reduce insulin resistance in women with PCOS. Add some to your porridge in the morning or add to herbal tea.

**Vitamin D** - Both calcium and vitamin D play significant roles in health. Where PCOS is concerned, calcium protects cardiovascular health. Vitamin D plays a role in glucose metabolism. Studies have shown that people with type 2 diabetes are often deficient in vit. D. A small study of 13 women with PCOS showed that 7 out of the 9 who had absent or irregular menstrual cycles, had a return of normal menstrual cycles within two months of being given 50,000 IU once or twice per week of vitamin D and 1,500 mg per day of calcium.<sup>10</sup> This is a marked improvement! Of those 13 women, 5 were shown to be vitamin D deficient. Good food sources of vitamin D are cod liver oil, eggs, salmon, mackerel, sunshine, daylight. Calcium can be found in kale, turnip, collard, and mustard greens, kelp and wakame seaweed. Hiziki, a type of seaweed has 10 times more calcium than a glass of milk.

**Licorice root (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)** – believed to help maintain proper hormone production and release, I have found licorice herbal tea very helpful.

**Vitex (*Vitex agnus-castus*)** (Chaste Tree Berry) - one of the most powerful herbs for women’s fertility and menstrual health. There are numerous studies and testimonials of its support on hormonal balance.

**DIM** - balances the hormones and helps to breakdown excess oestrogen.

**Royal Jelly and Bee Propolis** - have been shown to reduce inflammation and naturally boost the body’s immune system. They may also aid in hormonal balance through endocrine system support.

**Summary** - There are many ways to support the health of a woman’s body diagnosed with PCOS. I suggest you follow these 5 key tips or consider further naturopathic support

1. Ensure you have been diagnosed by a doctor.
2. Follow a PCOS specific diet to help decrease insulin resistance, balance weight and promote oestrogen metabolism.
3. Promote hormonal balance and support regular ovulation. Consider supportive herbs and supplements but recommendations include seeing a professional nutritional therapist such as myself.
4. Drink water and exercise regularly.
5. Stick to your plan and take one day at a time. The body has the ability to recover.

## Other Therapies which Support PCOS

Abdominal Massage	Reflexology	Meditation	Exercise	Manual Lymphatic Drainage	Acupuncture	Far Infrared Therapy
Yoga	Reiki Healing	EFT				