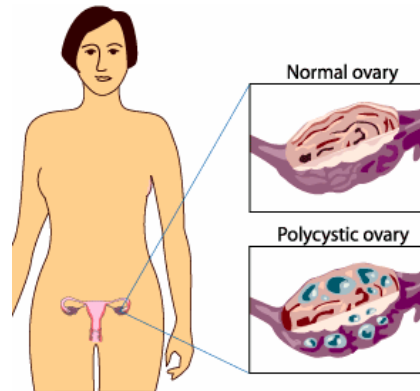


polycystic ovarian syndrome

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) is a health problem that can affect a woman's menstrual cycle, fertility, hormones, insulin production, heart, blood vessels and appearance. PCOS is the most common hormonal reproductive problem in women of childbearing age. An estimated 5-10% suffer from PCOS. Most women with PCOS have the following characteristics:

- High levels of male hormones, also called androgens
- An irregular or no menstrual cycle
- May or may not have many small cysts in their ovaries (cysts are fluid filled sacs)



Women with PCOS have trouble with their menstrual cycle due to the fact the ovaries do not make all of the hormones needed for the eggs to fully mature. They may begin to grow and accumulate fluid, but no one egg becomes large enough and instead some remain as cysts. As no egg matures or is released, ovulation does not occur and the hormone progesterone is not made. Without progesterone the menstrual cycle is irregular or absent, in addition the cysts that have developed will produce male hormones and this will continue to prevent ovulation.

Causes

The exact cause of PCOS is not known, although women with PCOS often have a mother or sister with the condition, to date there is not enough evidence to suggest a genetic link. Many sufferers of PCOS have a weight problem and researchers are looking at the relationship between PCOS and the body's ability to make insulin. Some women with PCOS make too much insulin and the ovaries react to this by making too many male hormones, known as androgens. This overproduction of androgens can lead to acne, excessive hair growth, weight gain, and ovulation problems.

Symptoms

Some of the symptoms of PCOS sufferers are:

- Infrequent menstrual periods, no menstrual periods and or irregular bleeding
- Infertility or inability to get pregnant as they are not ovulating
- Acne, oily skin or dandruff
- Increased growth of hair on the face, chest, stomach, back, thumbs or toes
- Weight gain or obesity, usually carrying extra weight around the waist
- Type 2 diabetes
- High cholesterol, high blood pressure
- Pelvic pain

Treatment

Unfortunately there is no cure for PCOS, it will need to be managed to prevent problems. Treatment will be based on the symptoms each sufferer has, and whether or not they want to conceive or need contraception. Some treatment options can include the following:

- Birth control pills – these can help regulate menstrual cycles, reduce male hormone levels and help to clear acne
- Diabetes medications, such as Metformin, as it can affect the way insulin regulates glucose and decreases testosterone production
- Fertility medications and surgery
- Maintenance of a healthy weight through a balanced diet and physical activity can help the body to lower glucose levels, use insulin more efficiently and may help to restore a normal period.

References: <http://www.4woman.gov/faq/pcos.htm>