

1 in 10 women in the UK live with PCOS



Do you have any of the following?

**infrequent periods | weight problems
excess hair | acne and oily skin
hair loss | mood swings**

If you do, then you could have
Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

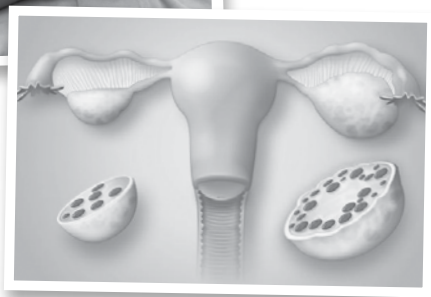
What is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)?

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is often called the ‘thief of womanhood’ because of the devastating effect the symptoms can have on a woman’s appearance and self-esteem. PCOS is one of the leading causes of fertility problems in women.

The term ‘polycystic ovaries’ describes ovaries that contain many small ‘cysts’ (about twice as many as in normal ovaries) and are usually no bigger than 8 millimetres each and are egg-containing follicles that have not developed properly. These are not cysts as you may imagine them to be; they don’t cause pain and aren’t harmful to you (so no surgical removal is needed) and they don’t lead to ovarian cancer.

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS):

- affects millions of women in the UK and worldwide
- runs in families
- is one of the leading causes of fertility problems
- has long term health risks
- can affect quality of life and self esteem



Above right: Illustration of ovaries
Normal ovary left, Polycystic ovary right

What causes PCOS?

Each women with PCOS is different, and you don't have to have all or even most of the symptoms to have the condition. Some women may only have a couple of symptoms that are mild, while others may have a wider range of symptoms that affect her more severely.

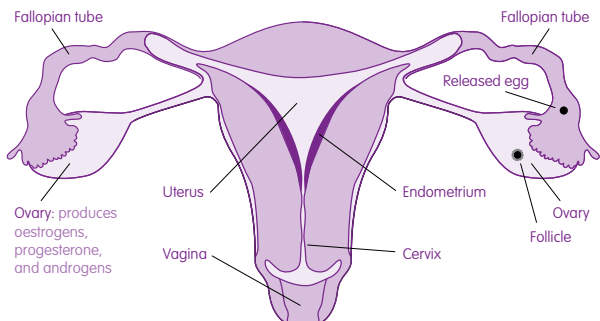
What causes PCOS?

Doctors don't fully understand the cause of PCOS, though it is commonly accepted now that PCOS runs in families – and you could have inherited it from your Mum *or* Dad's side! It may be that there are several causes, which could explain why different women have such different symptoms.

What they do know, is that the symptoms of PCOS are associated with abnormalities in the hormones that control your menstrual cycle. All women produce testosterone from their ovaries, however if you're a woman with PCOS, you will typically produce higher than average amounts. It's this excess testosterone that results in many of the symptoms, such as excess hair and hair loss.

It is also thought that another hormone – insulin – may be involved in the development of PCOS. Many women with PCOS have been found to have a condition known as insulin resistance, and it seems that these high levels of insulin affect the ovaries, contributing to the abnormal hormone environment.

Below:
The uterus



What are the symptoms and how is it diagnosed?

What are the symptoms ?

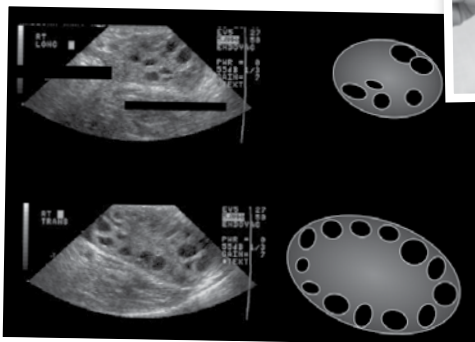
- irregular periods, or a complete lack of periods
- irregular ovulation, or no ovulation at all
- unwanted facial or body hair (hirsutism)
- oily skin and/or acne
- thinning hair or hair loss from the scalp (alopecia)
- weight problems – being overweight, rapid weight gain, difficulty losing weight
- depression and mood swings

Symptoms usually start in adolescence, although some women do not develop them until their early to mid twenties.

How is it diagnosed?

PCOS is usually diagnosed using a combination of an ultrasound scan to check for polycystic ovaries and blood tests to detect hormonal abnormalities. Your doctor should also check your blood pressure level and, if you are overweight, your blood sugar level. Once a diagnosis has been made, your doctor may refer you to a specialist – usually a gynaecologist (a doctor specialising in caring for a woman's reproductive system) or an endocrinologist (a doctor specialising in the hormonal system).

Below: Ultrasound of ovaries
Normal ovary top, Polycystic ovary bottom



What are the health risks and can it be treated?

What are the health risks?

There are two clear risks to health that women with PCOS must be aware of. These are the risk of developing cancer of the womb lining (endometrial cancer), and the risk of developing diabetes in middle age (type 2 diabetes) which also puts you at an increased risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

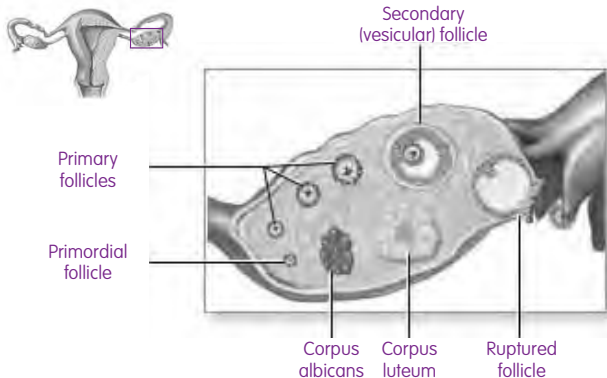
Can PCOS be treated?

Yes.

Medical treatments cannot currently offer a 'cure' for PCOS, so they tend to be aimed at managing the symptoms. For example, if you are trying to get pregnant and are not ovulating, your doctor will refer you to a fertility specialist and there are a number of treatments available to help stimulate ovulation. Or, if your primary concern is treating excess facial and body hair or acne, you might be referred to a dermatologist to look at the most suitable treatments for you.

The good news is that many of the symptoms and the health risks can be managed successfully without medical intervention, through good nutrition, exercise and adopting a generally healthy lifestyle.

Below: Follicle development



Who is Verity?

Verity: The PCOS Self Help Group

Verity is the UK's only charity for women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), and provides information and support for women with PCOS and their loved ones. It was founded in 1997 and is run entirely by a team of volunteers.

In addition to publishing a range of information booklets covering all aspects of the condition Verity runs twice yearly conferences where delegates get the chance to hear from some of the UK's foremost PCOS experts. Verity publishes In Touch, a bi-annual member newsletter full of the latest information and research on PCOS.

Verity also provides advocacy, awareness and education to the healthcare profession through PCOS UK, Verity's medical education arm that was established in January 2005.

Further information about Verity and PCOS can be found on our website www.verity-pcos.org.uk or through our blogs and forums, listed below.



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