

# PCOS affects one in 10 women, may be linked to other serious diseases

20 January 2015, by Allison Perry

Despite its name, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) isn't actually a disease of the ovary.

PCOS got its name after researchers and clinicians in the 1930s associated abnormalities in ovarian function and appearance with endocrine abnormalities in women. Since then, we have realized that the ovarian dysfunction is a secondary issue that is caused by the underlying metabolic and endocrine changes seen with PCOS. Let's explore some of the common questions about PCOS.

## What are the common symptoms of PCOS?

Menstrual irregularities are the most common reasons that lead to women with PCOS seeking evaluation. Other common symptoms include excess [hair growth](#) on the face and body, acne, and obesity.

## What other health issues does PCOS contribute to?

Patients with PCOS are more likely to have infertility, obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mood disorders, and endometrial cancer.

## How is PCOS diagnosed?

There isn't one specific diagnostic test that is used to diagnose PCOS. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends the use of specific clinical and diagnostic criteria to make a diagnosis of PCOS. The NIH criteria include:

1. Abnormal menstruation/ovulation
2. Clinical and or biochemical evidence of increased androgen hormones (increased hair growth on the face and body, acne, balding)
3. Exclusion of other known diseases that could cause the excess androgen hormones

Using these criteria, it's estimated that roughly 10 percent of women in the US have PCOS.

## How would my doctor evaluate me for PCOS?

A doctor would discuss your menstrual pattern and history, perform a physical exam, and order lab tests. If the evaluation fits the NIH criteria, then you will be diagnosed with PCOS.

## What causes PCOS?

The ovaries are not the primary cause of PCOS. Therefore, removing the ovaries will not cure this problem. We don't fully understand all the factors involved in PCOS. We do know that it is caused by the interplay of many complex genetic factors among genes that control energy metabolism as well as hormone synthesis and secretion.

## Can PCOS be treated?

PCOS cannot be cured, but the disease can be managed. Lifestyle changes and behavior modification can have the most impact on the clinical symptoms of PCOS. Exercise, healthy eating, weight control, and some medications can counteract some of the metabolic changes, thus decreasing the clinical characteristics of PCOS. It is just as important to monitor and treat the other [health issues](#) associated with PCOS, such as diabetes and [cardiovascular disease](#).

## Does PCOS affect the ability to become pregnant?

Yes, it can. The menstrual irregularities seen in PCOS are due to abnormal ovulatory function. When ovulation does not occur, an egg is not released, thus decreasing the chance of pregnancy. Treating PCOS as described previously can decrease the risk of infertility. Ovulation induction medications can also be used to help improve ovulatory function.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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