

PCOS



WHAT IS POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME?

PCOS EXPLAINED

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a condition that causes irregular menstrual periods because monthly ovulation is not occurring and levels of androgens (male hormones) are elevated. The condition occurs in approximately 5 to 10% of women. The elevated androgen levels can cause excessive facial hair growth or stomach/back hair growth, acne, and/or scalp hair thinning. Most, *but not all*, women with PCOS are overweight or obese, and they are at higher-than-average risk of developing diabetes and obstructive sleep apnea. For women with PCOS who want to become pregnant, fertility medications may be needed to trigger ovulation.

Although PCOS is not completely reversible, **there are a number of treatments** that can reduce or minimize symptoms. **Most women with PCOS are able to lead a normal life without significant complications.** They can become pregnant with weight loss and fertility treatments to help ovulation occur.

PCOS SYMPTOMS

Signs and symptoms of PCOS *usually begin* around puberty, although some women do not develop symptoms until late adolescence or even into early adulthood. **Symptoms include:**

- Menstrual irregularity
- Weight gain and obesity
- Scalp hair loss
- Infertility
- Sleep apnea
- Facial hair growth
- Heart disease
- Sexual dysfunction
- Eating disorders
- Depression and anxiety
- Acne and/or oily skin
- Body hair growth

PCOS DIAGNOSIS

There is no single test for diagnosing PCOS. You may be diagnosed with PCOS based upon your symptoms, blood tests, pelvic ultra sound, and a physical examination. Expert groups have determined that **a woman must have two out of three of the following to be diagnosed with PCOS:**

- Irregular menstrual periods caused by anovulation or irregular ovulation.
- Evidence of elevated androgen levels. The evidence can be based upon signs (excess hair growth, acne, or male-pattern balding) or blood tests (high androgen levels).
- Polycystic ovaries on pelvic ultrasound.

In addition, ***there must be no other cause of elevated androgen levels or irregular periods*** (i.e, congenital adrenal hyperplasia [classic or non-classic], androgen-secreting tumors, or hyperprolactinemia).

Blood tests are recommended to determine whether another condition is the cause of your signs and/or symptoms. If you have irregular periods - blood tests for pregnancy, prolactin level, thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), and follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) should be done.

PCOS TREATMENTS

- Oral contraceptives
- Progestin pills
- Hair treatment (*for facial/body hair or hair loss on scalp*)
- Metformin (*for period regularity and diabetes management*)
- Acne treatments (*topical treatments, medication, etc.*)
- Weight loss/management
- Infertility treatment

****A referral from a primary care provider is needed before seeing a Tanner Clinic endocrinologist for PCOS**