



# PCOS: What **Teens** Need to Know

## WHAT IS PCOS?

PCOS, which stands for polycystic ovary syndrome, is a common condition in teenage girls and women. PCOS is when you have a hormone imbalance. Besides estrogen (the main female hormone), women also make small amounts of testosterone (the main male hormone). In PCOS, girls and women make a little extra testosterone.

- Unwanted hair growth on your face, chest, back, hands, upper arms and legs, or around your nipples
- Acne
- Thinner hair on your head
- Patches of dark, thickened skin on your neck, armpits, or between your breasts
- Weight problems

Teens and women with PCOS also are at higher risk for type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and/or high cholesterol.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Although there's no "cure" for PCOS, treatment can help with symptoms and put your hormones back in balance.**

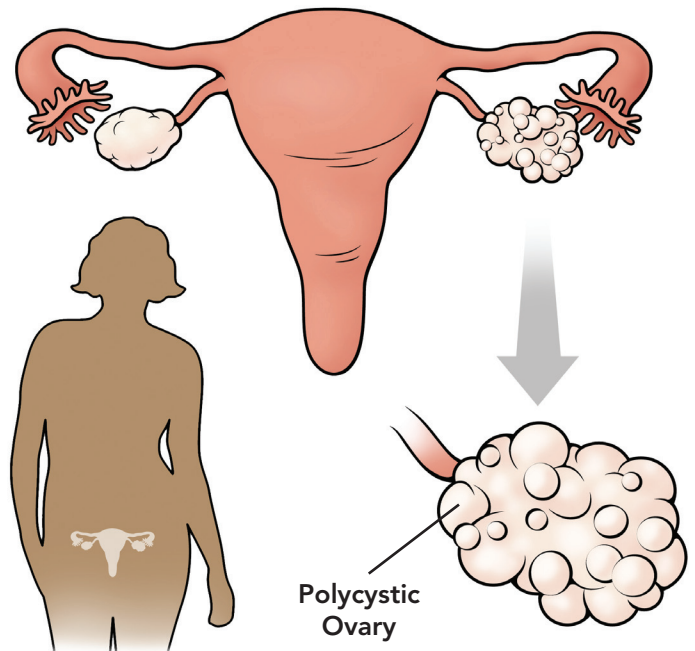
## WHAT CAUSES PCOS?

Doctors aren't exactly sure what causes PCOS. For most women, it's probably a combination of factors, including the genes you inherit from your family. For example, women with PCOS are more likely to have a mother or sister with PCOS.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF PCOS?

The signs and symptoms include having

- Irregular menstrual periods, which means having your period more than once a month or every few months, or never having your period
- Periods that are very heavy or very light



## HOW DOES A DOCTOR CHECK FOR PCOS?

Your doctor will do a physical exam and ask you about your health, your medicines, and your menstrual cycle. The doctor will also want to know whether there's a family history of PCOS (in your mother, an aunt, or a sister). In a physical exam, your doctor will check your blood pressure, your height, and your weight. Your doctor will also look at hair growth on your body and will check for patches of darkened skin.

Your doctor might order blood tests to check hormone levels, blood glucose (sugar), or cholesterol. Sometimes, doctors might do a pelvic exam or order an ultrasound (imaging) test of the ovaries and uterus. This kind of test can show whether you have ovarian cysts, which are fluid-filled bubbles in or on the ovaries. Your doctor will make sure there are no other causes of irregular periods or altered hormone levels.

## WHAT'S THE TREATMENT FOR PCOS?

Treatments include one or more of the following:

- Changes in your lifestyle such as having fewer sugary drinks and high-calorie desserts to help control your weight, exercising each day, and avoiding smoking
- Counseling with a registered dietitian to help you choose healthy foods and lose weight if you need to
- Medicines that contain the female hormones estrogen and progesterone (or just progesterone), such as birth control pills, a vaginal ring, or a skin patch; medicines to help your body use insulin better, such as metformin (for pre-diabetes or diabetes); and/or acne medicine
- Treatment for unwanted body and facial hair, such as bleach, wax, medicines, shaving, electrolysis, or laser treatment

## WILL PCOS AFFECT WHETHER I CAN HAVE A BABY IN THE FUTURE?

PCOS may or may not affect whether you can have a baby. When the time comes, your doctor can help you with fertility problems.

## WHAT CAN I DO TO COPE WITH PCOS?

Seeing a doctor who knows about PCOS is the first step. Choose a doctor who specializes in hormone problems (an endocrinologist) or a doctor who specializes in women's health (a gynecologist or a family doctor). Remember that the sooner you get help for your PCOS, the sooner you could lower your risk for related health problems such as diabetes.

Your doctor can help you find ways to feel better about your appearance. For example, you can ask your doctor about the best way to remove unwanted facial hair. If you feel worried or depressed, ask your parents or your doctor where to go for counseling. You can also go to a support group to talk with others who have PCOS. It's braver to get counseling than to suffer in silence.

## Questions to ask your doctor

- Do I have PCOS?
- What are my options for treatment?
- What are the risks and benefits of each treatment option?
- How long will I need treatment?
- Should I see an endocrinologist?
- Should I see a registered dietitian?

## RESOURCES

- Find-an-Endocrinologist: [www.hormone.org/contact-a-health-professional/find-an-endocrinologist](http://www.hormone.org/contact-a-health-professional/find-an-endocrinologist) or call 1-800-HORMONE (1-800-467-6663)
- Hormone Health Network information about PCOS: [www.hormone.org/diseases-and-conditions/womens-health/polycystic-ovary-syndrome](http://www.hormone.org/diseases-and-conditions/womens-health/polycystic-ovary-syndrome)
- Find a registered dietitian (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics): [www.eatright.org/programs/rdfinder/](http://www.eatright.org/programs/rdfinder/)
- PCOS Foundation: <http://pcosfoundation.org/index.php>
- WomensHealth.gov information about PCOS: <http://womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/polycystic-ovary-syndrome.pdf>
- MedlinePlus (National Institutes of Health) information about PCOS: [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/polycysticovarysyndrome.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/polycysticovarysyndrome.html)
- TeensHealth (Nemours Foundation) information about PCOS: [http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual\\_health/girls/pcos.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/girls/pcos.html)

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The Hormone Health Network offers free, online resources based on the most advanced clinical and scientific knowledge from The Endocrine Society ([www.endocrine.org](http://www.endocrine.org)). The Network's goal is to move patients from educated to engaged, from informed to active partners in their health care. This fact sheet is also available in Spanish at [www.hormone.org/audiencias/pacientes-y-cuidadores](http://www.hormone.org/audiencias/pacientes-y-cuidadores).

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