

## Further information

If you have any queries or problems with your treatment at any time please contact Mr. Borase's secretary/ fertility nurse on **01727 897 449** or your consultant's secretary who will contact the appropriate person from the team and will call you back.

## How to contact us

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If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email [pals@whht.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@whht.nhs.uk)



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**West Hertfordshire  
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**A guide to...**

# Polycystic ovarian syndrome: Dietary advice

*Patient information*

**Obstetrics and Gynaecology**

Watford General Hospital

Hemel Hempstead Hospital

St Albans City Hospital

## Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) - Dietary advice

### What is PCOS?

PCOS is a condition that has effect on a woman's menstrual cycle, fertility, hormones and external appearance. This leaflet focuses mainly on the long-term health effects of PCOS than specific treatments for PCOS. You can request a separate leaflet on PCOS and its management.

### What are polycystic ovaries?

Polycystic ovaries appear larger than regular ovaries and have more number of follicles (approximately twice) and they can be found in around 20% women. However having polycystic ovaries is different than having a polycystic ovarian syndrome! Only 6-7% of women who have polycystic ovaries actually have PCOS

Symptoms of PCOS:

- Irregular periods or no periods at all (due to irregular or anovulation)
- Difficulty becoming pregnant (reduced fertility)
- Having more facial or body hair than is usual for you (hirsutism)
- Loss of hair on your head
- Being overweight, rapid increase in weight, difficulty in losing weight
- Oily skin, acne
- Depression and mood swings

Although symptoms vary a great deal from patient to patient ranging from milder to sever form of the condition.

Even though periods are irregular, there is always a small chance of conceiving hence if you do not wish to get pregnant, please contact your GP regarding appropriate contraception.

- Non-starchy fresh vegetables or frozen/canned vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, and carrots
- Whole grains such as whole wheat pasta, brown rice and whole wheat bread
- High fibre cereals such as Kashi®, shredded wheat, and All Bran®
- Look for cereals that have at least 5 grams of fibre per serving or sprinkle ½ cup of bran cereal or unprocessed bran on a low-fibre cereal to increase the fibre
- Sugar-free or low sugar drinks such as water, diet soda, Crystal Light®, Fruit20®, or seltzer water
- Sugar-free, light, or "no sugar added" foods such as Jell-O®, popsicles, yogurt, or pudding
- Crackers and snacks with fibre such as Triscuits®, Wasa®, or Popcorn

### Physical activity:

- Starting with mild exercise increasing it to a moderate level will not only boost the weight loss but will also help to maintain it long term
- You need to start with an activity, which you enjoy, it could be walking, running, cycling or swimming! Arranging them around your work will definitely help, eg. Gym or a pool on the way to work.
- You need to avoid prolonged periods of sedentary activity
- Joining a group will definitely help
- Always start with a mild activity and as your interest develops, you can increase it gradually so it becomes a regular activity

### How to achieve it?

- Targeted approach- you can plan how much weight you want to lose and spread it over a period of time and keep records so you can check the progress
- Realistic goals- one of half a lb. in a week is a reasonable target and you can increase it once you become confident and comfortable
- Gradual changes- any dietary changes or exercise, gradual change will make sure you remain motivated and reach next levels without any difficulties
- Support group- allows you to share your experiences with like minded people and makes it more fun
- Coping with lapses- lapses will be inevitable. As long as you make sure that lapses don't become a regular occurrence!

You will need to have small but regular frequent meals, which includes foods with low glycaemic index (GI) (these are the foods, which increase the level of sugar in your blood in a gradual way and that in turn helps to keep the insulin levels under control).

Cutting down alcohol intake helps as well.

Mild to moderate exercise will not only boost the weight loss but will also help to maintain the normal BMI. Being realistic about weight loss and having a targeted approach will definitely help to achieve the target BMI.

Weighing every week will be enough to be motivated to carry on and sometimes it might take 3-4 weeks before you see the desired effect.

If you are finding it difficult to lose weight, you can request your GP for an appointment with the dietitian and joining a support group is shown to be beneficial as well

You need to be careful as to what you eat as sometimes “sugar free” foods contain some additives that affect your insulin levels just as the sugars do.

#### **You can instead of:**

- Sweetened juice, canned fruit in heavy syrup, or sweetened applesauce
- Starchy vegetables such as potatoes, corn, and peas
- Refined grains made with white flour such as white bread, pasta and bagels or white rice
- Sugared cereals such as Lucky Charms®, Fruit Loops®, or Frosted Flakes® and other sweetened grains such as cereal bars (Nutrigrain Bars®), breakfast pastries (PopTarts®) and donuts
- Sugary drinks such as soda and juice
- Sugary foods such as cookies, cakes and candy
- Snacks such as potatoes chips, Fritos®, Doritos®, and tortilla chips

#### **Choose:**

- Fresh fruit or frozen/canned fruit without added sugar or Unsweetened applesauce

The exact cause of the PCOS is unknown but various genetic, lifestyle and hormonal factors have been implicated in the causation. Many women have an increase in their weight with PCOS and it's linked with worsening of the symptoms. Many of the symptoms of PCOS are thought to be due to insulin resistance. Insulin is a hormone, which helps your body to control the sugar levels in your blood and in women with PCOS the levels of insulin go up, which can cause difficulty in losing weight.

#### **Aims of the treatment**

Majority of the treatment is managing various symptoms of PCOS and try to prevent long-term health concerns such as heart disease and Type 2 diabetes as there is no cure for the condition.

This leaflet is aimed at discussing health problems secondary to weight gain and the effect of lifestyle modification with diet and exercise improving PCOS symptoms.

More information regarding PCOS can be obtained at:

- [www.verity-pcos.org.uk](http://www.verity-pcos.org.uk)

#### **PCOS and weight**

The dietary management aims at:

- Achieving normal BMI (if BMI is over 25)
- Reduce insulin resistance
- Having a balanced healthy diet
- Exercise

Everyone realizes that losing weight is not easy and requires a lot of effort, patience and motivation. Even more efforts needed to maintain the lost weight. Hence only diet will not help or be enough. Hence we recommend small, consistent changes to your lifestyle, which are easy to achieve as well as maintain in a long run so as to avoid long-term health complications.