

Managing PCOS

This PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome) resource is a culmination of a month-long series on our social media sites.

Our goal was to educate our readers about:

1. Contributing factors to PCOS
2. Lifestyle, nutritional, and supplemental recommendations for managing the condition
3. Common misconceptions about PCOS

Here is our compiled list, our PCOS “chapbook” – 31 considerations and suggestions for helping you manage this condition:

1. PCOS is a condition that isn’t fully understood by the medical community – it occurs when the pituitary gland and ovaries don’t communicate and can cause irregular ovulation and irregular build-up and shedding of the uterine lining.
2. PCOS is characterized by ovarian cysts – follicles form like a pearl necklace on the ovaries, but produce no eggs. The cysts aren’t dangerous; they don’t increase in size, aren’t cancerous, and don’t require surgery.
3. PCOS can be put into remission – cysts can disappear with holistic and integrative treatment.
4. PCOS is largely underdiagnosed because symptoms vary and can morph over time: infertility, irregular or absent cycles, acne, weight loss resistance, systemic inflammation, hair loss, and excess hair growth.
5. PCOS is one of the primary causes of infertility – some doctors say it’s the #1 reason – and some straightforward dietary and lifestyle changes can be all that’s needed to conceive. Having PCOS doesn’t mean that a healthy pregnancy is out of the question.
6. PCOS is characterized by high androgens – “masculine” hormones like testosterone and DHEA that result in adult acne and excess hair growth on the belly, arms, thighs, breasts, chin, or upper lip.



7. Women with PCOS can go for months without a cycle and then bleed heavily – sometimes for days – because the uterine lining has gotten so thick that the body must shed it.
8. PCOS is often temporary. It responds very well to natural dietary and lifestyle strategies, especially strategies for insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome. Insulin resistance is usually the result of sedentary lifestyle, high sugar and refined carbohydrate intake, and exposure to environmental toxins. Remember, the cysts can regress!
9. Long-term effects of PCOS can include anxiety, depression, moodiness, anger, low libido, heart disease, abnormal liver enzymes, and an increased risk of breast and endometrial cancer.
10. In addition to high androgens (“masculine” hormones), PCOS is also characterized by high cortisol and insulin. Most women with high androgens (a characteristic of PCOS) have insulin resistance. This is why many doctors are quick to prescribe drugs like Metformin or Glucophage (Type 2 diabetes drugs).
11. PCOS is systemic – it’s impossible to “treat” it with diabetes drugs or the birth control pill; neither gets to the root of the condition. The birth control pill stops ovulation – with PCOS, a woman is already not ovulating.
12. With PCOS, if meds are stopped but there are no changes to diet and lifestyle, the ovaries may become polycystic again.
13. It’s critical to get a proper diagnosis with PCOS. Check for insulin resistance. Get a physical examination, a fasting lipid profile, a glucose test, and an insulin test (before and two hours after a high-carbohydrate meal). Check hormone levels, including a Day 21 progesterone assessment. Test for Vitamin D deficiency. Although we recommend comprehensive testing for proper diagnosis, you can [monitor your own blood sugar at home with a glucometer](#).

Strategies for managing PCOS:

14. Strategy #1: [Balance your blood sugar!](#)
15. Strategy #2: Eat a low glycemic/high fiber diet.
16. Strategy #3: Manage your weight. We know, this is often easier said than done. But we've found that in addition to maintaining proper thyroid and adrenal function, learning the foundation of blood sugar balancing is one of the SINGLE best strategies for losing weight.
17. Strategy #4: Get the right type of exercise for your body – exercise increases insulin sensitivity. Not too much exercise, not too little. If you suffer from fatigue, [this post](#) will help.
18. Strategy #5: Eat zinc-rich foods like spinach, sea vegetables, crimini and shiitake mushrooms, grassfed beef, lamb, turkey (dark meat), oysters, crab, scallops, adzuki beans, chick peas (garbanzo beans), sesame seeds, almonds, pumpkin seeds, cashews, and whole grains such as amaranth, buckwheat, and millet.
19. Strategy #6: Avoid dairy – substitute with coconut milk products.
20. Strategy #7: [Avoid sugar and caffeine completely.](#)
21. Strategy #8: Take a [quality fish oil supplement](#), which has been shown to improve insulin sensitivity and tame inflammation.
22. Strategy #9: Take a [quality Vitamin D supplement](#) – your levels should be at least 50 ng/mL.
23. Strategy #10: Take [alpha lipoic acid](#), which has been said to “smash” insulin resistance!
24. Strategy #11: Participate in yoga and/or a mindfulness practice.

25. Strategy #12: [Greatly reduce plastics exposure](#) (and other endocrine disruptors such as flame retardants, nonstick cookware, and chemically-laden and toxic skincare and cosmetics).
26. Strategy #13: [Reduce systemic inflammation](#) and oxidative stress.
27. Strategy #14: Improve liver detoxification. Three effective ways to do this are: 1. Drinking warm lemon water first thing in the morning (a cup of warm water with the juice of half a lemon squeezed in); 2. Taking [DIM](#) (Di-indolymethane), which is also great for maintaining healthy estrogen levels; and 3. Taking a [dandelion root/milk thistle herbal combination](#).
28. Strategy #15: [Chasteberry \(aka vitex\)](#) is a wonderful herb for PCOS (and overall hormonal balance), as it stimulates and balances the function of the pituitary gland.
29. Strategy #16: [Black cohosh](#) suppresses the release of luteinizing hormone (LH), which is often high in women with PCOS and can contribute to miscarriage.
30. Strategy #17: [Saw palmetto](#) (yes, the “prostate herb”) acts as an “anti-androgen” by reducing testosterone and blocking androgen cell receptors. It can be particularly useful for those experiencing excess hair growth.
31. Strategy #18: Manage your stress. We know this is easier said than done. But simply doing the [4-7-8 breath](#) on a regular basis can help tremendously. Trust us!

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