

## POLYCYSTIC OVARIAN SYNDROME

Also known as Stein-Leventhal Syndrome or chronic oligoanovulation. A condition of the hormonal system that can cause infertility in 4-12% of women. It means that instead of the ovarian follicles releasing a developed egg at ovulation, a cyst is formed, trapping the underdeveloped egg inside the swelling follicle.

**Symptoms:** Sudden weight gain, facial hair and irregular menses, enlarged ovaries and ovarian cysts, acne, growth of body hair, high blood pressure, dandruff, baldness. Metabolic problems like high insulin levels, obesity, high cholesterol and type II diabetes. Mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, bipolar and binge-eating. Long term PCOS also increases the risk of endometrial cancer and heart disease.

**Causes:** No definite cause known, plenty of theories based around an imbalance of hormones. Women with PCOS show about twice the level of testosterone (a male steroid hormone naturally found in a woman's body) as other women, and they are often insulin-resistant. There are many research theories for PCOS. Some suggest it can be genetic, passed on from mother to child, some think that the ovaries produce too much testosterone because the hypothalamus has abnormalities, some theorise that ovarian abnormality causes overproduction of testosterone, another shows that too much insulin can cause the ovaries to overproduce testosterone, and another idea is that PCOS itself is a side effect of insulin-resistance, not the other way round. So it's complex and there are no definite answers available from the medical world yet.

## HOLISTIC SELF-HELP IDEAS

### Weight Loss

Exercising moderately and regularly is the first thing recommended (by doctors) to those experiencing PCOS symptoms, because the list of its benefits are far-reaching and wide-ranging. Such exercise has been proven to help alleviate depression and anxiety, diabetes, endometrial cancer, and heart disease while weight loss has been medically proven to lower circulating testosterone levels, improve metabolism, and reduce all the PCOS symptoms. It's a no-brainer, it doesn't have to be boring, and you only need a 5% weight drop to regulate your hormones.

### Diet

A vegan diet is often suggested to PCOS sufferers because it has been proven that it is conducive to weight loss. Rich in plant-based nutrition and beneficial plant proteins like beans and lentils, the vegan diet easily provides the good sources of protein recommended with each meal. Increase foods with Omega 3 fatty acids such as cooking with rapeseed (canola) oil, eating more nuts and ground up seeds like flax, walnuts, chia, mustard and hemp. Increasing Vitamin A via well-cooked green, red and orange foods is also beneficial. Avoid trans-fats because they interfere with hormonal signals throughout the body. Alisa Vitti, whose entire work is based on how she overcame PCOS, has named 5 foods other than sugar and dairy for PCOS sufferers to avoid; stevia, red meat, raw kale, 'cooling' foods like cucumber, mint and spirulina, and soy.

### Acupuncture

Often recommended by doctors, acupuncture is a very respected method of reducing testosterone production and regulating menses.

## Menstrual cycle awareness work:

By charting whatever cycle we have, we can learn how to observe our inner fluctuations, such as our emotions, energy levels, and physical body changes. If we respond to our inner changing rhythms we're actually putting less stress on our system as a whole. If our life is a little chaotic we can aim to bring a little more rhythm and routine into it. Things like regular meal times and sleep patterns can help, as well as planning for some 'down-time' and getting as much natural light as possible.

## Physical:

AVIVA Method, Deer Exercise and Maya Abdominal massage.

## Homeopathic remedies:

A homeopathic doctor treats the whole person and not just their hormones and ovaries. Homoeopathy encourages the body to heal itself; it is not a quick fix but is an incredibly safe powerful mode of treatment for chronic conditions over the long term.

## Psychological:

Dr Christine Northrup recommends that we look at any negative conditioning received as a child about being a fertile woman. By being mindful of these narratives and bringing light to these old messages we can work out if it's something useful or something to let go of. Also another idea of Susun Weed's to explore is our own feelings around whether we are too 'male-identified'; a problem she believes is common in modern cultures. Journaling about the above can be a really good tool to be used at different times of your cycle because your feelings will be different for example when you are

## Herbs

Herbalist Susun Weed's recommendations in her article (link below) are Chaste Berry tincture (vitex) for it's strong effect on the reproductive system, Saw Palmetto for it's ability to regulate androgens (male sex hormones), dandelion tincture, and Fenugreek to help cells accept and use insulin. Shepherd's purse tincture can also help to control bleeding, and 3-6 quarts of nourishing herbal infusion (see resources for recipe). Another herb recommended to me by a PCOS sufferer is Shatavari which can balance the endocrine system and has the reputation of being a classicwoman's herb.

## MEDICAL SOLUTIONS AND PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

### Metformin

A commonly used insulin-assisting drug that helps to reduce testosterone, is beneficial with regards insulin, promotes ovulation, increases the chances of pregnancy, helps to prevent weight gain, and lessens extra hair growth.

### The combined contraceptive pill

It reduces male hormones, helps acne, regulates hormone production, and it has become an accepted option within the medical industry to regulate the menstrual cycle by artificial hormones and it works really well for lots of people.

### Surgery

A last-resort option involving ovarian drilling (a.k.a laparoscopy), oophorectomy, hysterectomy, or cyst aspiration.

### Resveratrol

Resveratrol, found in grapes nuts and berries (and tiny amount in red wine!), decreases testosterone production while positively affecting both insulin levels and insulin sensitivity. You would need approximately 1,500mg for any substantial improvement to be made.