

Patient Information

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

Gynaecology Department

Polycystic ovarian syndrome is common. It may cause period problems, increased weight, delay in getting pregnant and increased hair growth on arms and face.

Q. What is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome?

A. Ovaries are small organs near the womb. The job of ovaries is to produce eggs, hormones and control periods. In polycystic ovarian syndrome eggs are not produced every month and periods may not be controlled. Ovaries look cystic on ultrasound scan. Ovaries fail to produce the normal female "sex" hormones in correct proportions.

Q. Why have I got polycystic ovarian syndrome?

A. It is genetic (inherited at birth like eye or hair colour). Although you may be at risk of polycystic ovarian syndrome from birth, its symptoms do not occur until your periods have started. Sometimes it only starts after a weight increase.

Q. How do you test for polycystic ovarian syndrome?

A. With an ultrasound scan of your ovaries and blood tests.

Q. What problems can polycystic ovarian syndrome cause?

A. It may cause easy weight gain, difficult weight loss, heavy periods, irregular or absent periods, constant bleeding, increased hair growth on the face and body, skin problems, takes longer to become pregnant and an increased risk of miscarriage.

Q. Is there a cure?

A. No, but each of the symptoms can be treated very effectively.

Q. What are the treatments available?

A. It depends on which symptoms are problems for you.

Q. Are there any long term problems having polycystic ovaries?

A. Yes, but do not worry these can be prevented.

Weight

Losing weight can be very difficult especially with polycystic ovarian syndrome. Unfortunately there is no magic pill or secret.

A combination of eating less and exercising more is essential.

Advice from a dietician and help from a practice nurse or Weight Watchers club may help. Weight loss improves all the symptoms of polycystic ovarian syndrome and has long term health benefits.

Treating Hair Growth

Shaving, waxing, hair removing creams can help but must be repeated. Electrolysis and laser treatments may be permanent but are expensive and are not available on the NHS. Medicines can help including the contraceptive pill or other tablets if you cannot use the contraceptive pill but improvements will only occur after 6 months of treatment.

Treating Period Problems

Regular and lighter periods can occur with treatment with the combined contraceptive pill or mini pill. It is not dangerous to have infrequent periods providing you have at least 3 in a year.

Fertility

It may take longer to get pregnant with polycystic ovarian syndrome. If you do not conceive after 12 months of unprotected regular intercourse then further investigation may be needed. Frequently the treatment may simply involve taking tablets.

Diabetes

Polycystic ovarian syndrome is a risk for developing diabetes in later life. This is especially so if you weight is increased. Weight loss is very important to prevent problems later in life. Your doctor will offer you screening for diabetes with a blood or urine test.

Heart Disease

Polycystic ovarian syndrome MAY be a risk for heart disease in the future especially if your weight is increased. Your doctor will offer you a blood test for cholesterol level, another risk factor for heart disease that can be treated. Weight loss and regular exercise will help to prevent heart disease.

Cancers

If you have polycystic ovarian syndrome and your periods occurs less than 3 times a year there can be a risk of developing cancer of the womb in the future. This can be prevented by medication to give you more frequent periods.

So far there is no evidence that there are any other long term risks of polycystic ovarian syndrome.

If you have any worries or questions please do not hesitate to contact your doctor.