



## Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)

### What is PCOS?

PCOS is a hormonal disorder in which individuals have either infrequent or prolonged menstrual periods or have very high androgen levels. This results in the ovaries producing small collections of fluid (follicles) and failing to regularly release eggs.

### What are the Symptoms of PCOS?

PCOS symptoms typically develop either around the time of the first menstrual period, or later in life, following a dramatic change (ex. substantial weight gain).

The symptoms include:

- **Irregular periods** (infrequent, irregular or prolonged)
- **Excess androgen**, resulting in excessive facial/body hair, severe acne, baldness, etc.
- **Polycystic ovaries**, meaning that your ovaries may be enlarged and contain follicles that surround the eggs, resulting in the irregular functioning of the ovaries.

The signs and symptoms of this disorder are typically more severe in obese individuals.

### How is PCOS Diagnosed?

- **Pelvic exam.** Your doctor may visually and manually inspect your reproductive organs for any abnormalities, such as masses or growths.
- **Blood tests.** Hormone levels in your blood may be analyzed, to exclude possible causes of menstrual abnormalities, or identify if there is a high level of androgens in your body.
- **Transvaginal ultrasound.** The wand like device (transducer) is placed in your vagina, allowing the doctor to check the appearance of your ovaries and the thickness of the lining of your uterus.

These tests will not definitively diagnose PCOS, however, they obtain valuable information that can assist in your doctor's diagnosis.

### **What are the Causes of PCOS?**

Although the exact causes of this disorder are not yet known, there are a few factors that may play a role. These include:

- **Excess insulin**, which may result in an increase of androgen production, causing difficulty with ovulation.
- **Excess androgen** produced by the ovaries, resulting in symptoms such as acne and causing difficulty with ovulation.
- **Low-grade inflammation**, meaning the white blood cells' production of substances to fight infection. Research shows that individuals with PCOS have a type of this inflammation which stimulates polycystic ovaries to produce androgens. This can lead to problems of the heart and blood vessels.
- **Heredity**. Research shows that certain genes may be linked to the disorder.

### **How is PCOS Treated?**

Depending on your individual concerns (infertility, obesity, acne, etc.) different treatment options are available.

It is not uncommon for lifestyle choices, such as a low-calorie diet and increased exercise to be suggested. Losing weight may improve your condition, as well as increase the effectiveness of any medications recommended by your doctor.

There are also a variety of medications available to treat certain symptoms. The goal may be to regulate your menstrual cycle, to help you ovulate, or to reduce excessive hair growth. There are different medications available depending on which symptoms you are focusing on treating.

### **What are the Complications of PCOS?**

- Gestational diabetes or pregnancy-induced high blood pressure
- Infertility
- Miscarriage or premature birth
- Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis — a severe liver inflammation caused by fat accumulation in the liver
- Metabolic syndrome — a cluster of conditions including high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and abnormal cholesterol or triglyceride levels that significantly increase your risk of cardiovascular disease
- Type 2 diabetes or prediabetes
- Sleep apnea
- Depression, anxiety and eating disorders
- Abnormal uterine bleeding
- Cancer of the uterine lining (endometrial cancer)

Obesity is also associated with PCOS and can worsen the complications of the disorder.

If you have any further questions regarding endometriosis or would like to see a health care provider regarding any sexual health matter, please contact us.

## **Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!**

**Location:**

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

**Hours:**

Monday: 9am – 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am – 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9am – 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

Friday: 9am – 4:30pm

**Phone:**

579-1009

Toll Free: 1-877-NO MYTHS

(1-877-666-9847)

**Website:**

[www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com](http://www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com)

**Email:**

[pp.nlshc@gmail.com](mailto:pp.nlshc@gmail.com)

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