

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is the most common female hormonal health problem and the cause of up to 30% of infertility in couples seeking treatment. It is commonly underdiagnosed and may affect up to as many as 15% of females during their reproductive years.

What is PCOS?

The term 'polycystic ovary syndrome' (PCOS) describes a complex disorder with a range of symptoms; the main feature being the presence of multiple underdeveloped tiny sacs (follicles) on the ovaries – often these underdeveloped follicles are unable to release an egg which means ovulation doesn't take place.

What causes PCOS?

PCOS is complex, difficult to diagnose and is often missed completely. There is no single known cause and it is likely that PCOS is caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. A large proportion of women have excessive secretion of testosterone and abnormal activity of insulin; one of the main hormones involved in blood sugar balance. Many body systems are affected in PCOS resulting in several health symptoms which may include menstrual dysfunction, infertility, miscarriage, acne, oily skin, depression, obesity, hirsutism (excessive hair growth), hair loss, insulin resistance and increased risk of metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease and chronic low grade inflammation.



The good news is that diet and lifestyle changes can be of significant help to women affected by PCOS. Effective natural treatment protocols commonly centre around the nutritional support of these four key areas:

PCOS - 4 key areas of support

1. Weight management
2. Blood sugar balance and insulin function normalisation
3. Hormone balance
4. Ovarian health support

Women often experience significant improvement in symptoms when these areas are addressed with targeted dietary and lifestyle strategies, and supplementation with specific nutrients and botanicals.

Key dietary, lifestyle and supplement factors

Dietary factors

- 🍴 Avoid refined, processed, convenience foods and sugary drinks and snacks
- 🍴 Eat 3 distinct meals daily, choose organic wholefoods cooked from scratch. Avoid snacks between meals
- 🍴 Eat within an 8-10 hour time-restricted window and finish your evening meal by 7pm. This is to facilitate a 14-16 hour overnight fast
- 🍴 Reduce caffeine & alcohol
- 🍴 Include good quality protein (poultry, meat, tofu, tempeh, beans, chickpeas, eggs) and fat (nuts, seeds and their oils, oily fish, avocados, olives, grass-fed butter) with each meal
- 🍴 Swap potatoes, pasta and rice for lower carbohydrate alternatives such as cauliflower rice, roasted celeriac, courgetti and cabbage pappardelle
- 🍴 Aim for 50% of your plate as non-starchy vegetables that grow above ground
- 🍴 Increase variety of plant foods; aim for 40+ different types of fruits, vegetables and culinary herbs in your diet each week
- 🍴 Have a daily portion of fermented foods such as kefir, kombucha, sauerkraut or kimchi
- 🍴 Include liver supportive foods and drinks in your daily diet such as fresh parsley, artichoke, nettle tea and green tea
- 🍴 Include a portion of cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli & cauliflower daily
- 🍴 Add phytoestrogen-rich foods such as miso, tempeh, tofu & chickpeas into your diet
- 🍴 Add freshly ground flaxseeds into your diet. They work well in smoothies or sprinkled on top of salads for a crunchy nutty texture.
- 🍴 Drink plenty of fresh filtered water daily

Lifestyle factors

- ♥ Pay close attention to your sleep hygiene to ensure you are regularly getting good quality sleep
- ♥ Audit your diet, lifestyle and environment to identify ways you can eliminate toxins wherever possible. Reducing overall toxic load is important for hormonal balance
- ♥ Regular exercise to support weight maintenance and a balanced stress response
- ♥ Build in extra time for relaxation and self-care into your daily routine
- ♥ Have a regular sauna to support the body's detoxification processes

Key nutrients

- ★ **Myo-inositol** - A number of recent studies have found myo-inositol to be an effective support in PCOS, in part due to its ability to improve insulin sensitivity, restore hormonal balance, improve menstrual regularity, reduce hyperandrogenism and influence ovarian function. Research has also demonstrated fertility-improving effects of myo-inositol among women with PCOS; and since the syndrome is the leading cause of female infertility, these results are particularly encouraging
- ★ **Magnesium** - Often nicknamed nature's tranquiliser, magnesium is important for a balanced stress response, and to support hormonal and blood sugar balance too
- ★ **B vitamins** - B vitamins are crucial for hormone balance, especially vitamin B6, which contributes to the regulation of hormonal activity and works closely with magnesium. Vitamin B6 is best supplemented as pyridoxal-5-phosphate, the active body ready form
- ★ **Chromium** - An essential mineral which is a key component of glucose tolerance factor which works synergistically with insulin to support the cellular uptake of glucose. In this way chromium may help to support body composition and healthy blood sugar levels

- ★ **Zinc** - An essential mineral for hormonal activity, including insulin, which makes it an important mineral for supporting blood sugar balance
- ★ **Alpha lipoic acid** - A powerful antioxidant that has been shown to support blood sugar metabolism and insulin sensitivity
- ★ **Vitamin C** - An important nutrient that helps to support a healthy stress response
- ★ **Glutathione** - The body's master antioxidant which protects against toxins and oxidative stress. Glutathione works well with alpha lipoic acid, green tea, milk thistle, turmeric and selenium

Targeted botanicals

- ✿ **Cinnamon** - A herbal ingredient with a long history of use in supporting insulin function and blood sugar normalisation
- ✿ **Milk thistle** - Plant extract with a long history of use for supporting liver function. Supporting liver function is important for hormonal balance
- ✿ **Berberine** - One of the most versatile herbal ingredients that has demonstrated beneficial impacts on blood sugar balance and insulin sensitivity