

WHAT EVERY WOMAN AND HER DOCTOR SHOULD KNOW ABOUT POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

SYMPTOMS OF PCOS:

PCOS is a hidden disorder that can appear in two or more of the following symptoms:

- Irregular or absent periods
- Excess body hair
- Weight gain
- Infertility
- Scalp hair loss
- High blood pressure
- Acne
- Ovarian cysts
- Elevated insulin levels

Women with these symptoms should see an endocrinologist, the medical experts on hormonal disorders, for an accurate diagnosis and treatment of symptoms. Treatment can help reduce the risk of serious, life-threatening complications.

PCOS AND ITS COMPLICATIONS:

Insulin Resistance Syndrome

- Research indicates that many women with PCOS have a number of features of Insulin Resistance Syndrome (IRS), which can put them at great risk for type 2 diabetes, heart attacks and strokes.

Diabetes

- Women with PCOS are at a much higher risk of developing diabetes.
- More than 50% of women with PCOS will have diabetes or impaired glucose tolerance before the age of 40.
- Studies have shown that 25-50 % of patients with diabetes between the ages of 20-50 have PCOS.

Liver Disorders

- In a new study, two out of three patients with PCOS were found to have Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD), even though five out of six of these women had normal liver tests.
- The prevalence of NAFLD in women with PCOS has not been previously described.
- If left untreated, NAFLD can lead to cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer.

Heart Disease

- Women with PCOS have heart disease at an early age; in some studies 40% have calcification in their coronary arteries before age 45 (compared to 20% of women without PCOS).
- Two recent studies of women with PCOS demonstrate a 50% increase in coronary events compared to controls.

High Blood Pressure

- Women with PCOS are at a greater risk of high blood pressure particularly after the age of forty.

Cholesterol

- LDL (bad) cholesterol levels increase and HDL (good) cholesterol levels decrease in women with PCOS.

Cancer

- Women with PCOS are at higher risk of endometrial (uterine) cancer.
- Studies have shown an association of IRS with breast cancer, which includes this group of women.

FACTS ABOUT PCOS:

- An estimated 10% of reproductive-age women (more than six million) in the United States have PCOS; many don't know they do.
- PCOS is the most common metabolic disorder of reproductive-age women in the U.S.
- PCOS is the most common cause of female infertility.
- There is an unfolding epidemic of girls with PCOS as young as eleven years old, which may be due in part to the dual epidemics of childhood obesity and children with type 2 diabetes.
- Premature puberty in young girls may be an early marker of future PCOS.
- Women with PCOS are the largest group of women at risk for the development of cardiovascular disease and diabetes.
- PCOS is generally considered a syndrome rather than a disease because it manifests itself through a group of signs and symptoms that can occur in any combination.
- PCOS is often considered a purely gynecological disorder since many PCOS symptoms involve a woman's reproductive system. It is, however, a systemic disorder involving hormones, sugar metabolism, lipids and blood vessels.
- PCOS is diagnosed by a simple blood test for a variety of hormones, including those produced by the ovaries, adrenal glands, pituitary gland and thyroid gland. A full physical examination and screening for cholesterol, triglycerides, and glucose should also be part of a complete evaluation.
- PCOS is treatable, but not curable, by medications, changes in diet, and exercise.

SOLUTIONS:

- AACE calls for widespread case findings of PCOS so that all of its hidden risks may be detected and treated to prevent heart attack, stroke, and all of the complications of uncontrolled diabetes including blindness, kidney failure, and amputation.
- At the AACE Consensus Conference on Guidelines for Glycemic Control in 2001, AACE called for diabetes screening for women with PCOS by age 30.
- Studies have shown that the risk of early death and debilitating complications can be significantly reduced if certain lifestyle changes are undertaken, including a controlled diet, vigorous exercise, and weight reduction.
- Medication is available to treat diabetes, hypertension, and lipid abnormalities when lifestyle changes are not enough to bring them under control.