

To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A



POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME Identify it early

Many women are unfamiliar with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome or PCOS. Polycystic Ovary Syndrome affects adolescent girls and women of childbearing age. It is estimated that it impacts as many as 1 in 15 women in the United States. It is a health

problem that affects a woman's menstrual cycle, ability to have children, hormones, heart, blood vessels and physical appearance.

Women with PCOS commonly have high levels of androgens (male hormones), missed or irregular periods and multiple cysts on their ovaries. The cause is not well understood. Experts believe that there could be several factors, including genetics, that could play a role. Women with a mother or sister who has PCOS are more likely to be affected.

The main underlying problem with PCOS is hormonal imbalance. In these women the ovaries make more androgens than normal. Although androgens are male hormones, women make them, too, in small amounts. When the levels of these androgens are too high, they can affect the development and release of eggs during ovulation. This can make becoming pregnant very difficult for affected women.

Researchers also believe that insulin may be linked to PCOS. Insulin is a hormone that controls the change of sugar, starches and other food into energy for the body to use or store. Many women with PCOS have too much insulin in their bodies because they have a problem using it. Excess insulin can increase the production of androgens. High androgens can lead to acne, excessive hair growth, weight gain and problems with ovulation.

The symptoms of PCOS can vary from woman to woman. Some of the symptoms can include: inability to get pregnant because of not ovulating, infrequent or absent periods. Hirsutism,

which is increased hair growth on the face, chest, stomach or back, is common. It can cause cysts on the ovaries, acne, weight gain and obesity, male pattern baldness or thinning hair, and patches of dark skin on the neck, arms, abdomen, breasts or thighs. Pregnant women may have increased risk of miscarriage, gestational diabetes or premature delivery. Women with PCOS are also at increased risk of diabetes, heart attack, hypertension, high cholesterol and sleep apnea.

There is no single test used to diagnose PCOS. If you have symptoms of PCOS, your healthcare Provider will take a thorough medical history, do a complete physical exam including blood pressure, BMI (body mass index) and measure your waist.

He or she will do a pelvic exam to see if your ovaries are enlarged, which can indicate ovarian cysts. Lab tests for androgen levels and glucose (blood sugar) and lipids will be ordered. A pelvic ultrasound may be ordered as well.

There is no cure for PCOS, so lifestyle changes are very important to prevent problems/complications from developing. Treatment goals are based on symptoms, such as whether you want to get pregnant, and lowering your risks for heart disease and diabetes. Many women with PCOS are overweight or obese.

Managing PCOS by eating healthy and exercising can help decrease weight to a healthy level. Women with PCOS who limit processed foods and added sugars, can help lower their blood sugar level and improve their body's use of insulin, and normalize hormone levels. A drop of even 10% of body weight can restore normal periods and regular cycles. Some medications may be used to manage the symptoms of PCOS. These can include birth control pills, diabetes medications and sometimes fertility drugs. Occasionally, procedures or surgery may be needed to help increase the chances of ovulation.

PCOS is a complex medical condition, which can impact health on many levels. If you believe that you might have the symptoms of PCOS, talk to your healthcare Provider. It is very important to get your symptoms under control at an early age to reduce your chances of developing complications such as heart disease and diabetes. A healthy lifestyle can improve how you feel, lower your weight and lower your risk for health problems in the future.

As always, I welcome your questions and comments. You can contact me @ health@the-independent.net.

The following websites have reliable information on PCOS and other health topics: www.mayoclinic.com, www.acog.org, www.webmd.com.

VERNONIA HEALTH FAIR

May 7, 9 am to 4 pm
Vernonia School Cafeteria
249 Bridge St. (green building)

- Lions Club - Sight & Hearing Exams
 - Red Cross - Bloodmobile & Emergency Preparedness Information
 - Providence Health & Services - Glucose, Cholesterol and Blood pressure testing (fasting 9-11am, non-fasting til 4pm)
 - Farmers Insurance, Agent Tom Haselstrom
 - Children's Fingerprinting & Pictures
 - Penny Costley - Jazzercise
 - Carol McIntyre, ND - Medical and Exercise Info
 - Dr. Scheuerman, Vernonia Dental
 - Free Dental Exams
 - Vernonia Prevention Coalition and Columbia County Sheriff's Office - Drug Take-back
- Healthy Food Provided by Vernonia Scouts
Sponsored by the Vernonia Health Board

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OR

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OR

866-397-6161

Military Helpline

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