

Living with PCOS: Understanding the Challenges and Finding Solutions

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INTRODUCTION

Women of reproductive age are susceptible to the common hormonal disorder known as polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

PCOS is a complicated and multidimensional disorder to manage since its symptoms, which usually first appear around puberty, can change over time. Hormonal abnormalities, irregular menstrual periods, high testosterone levels, and ovarian cysts are its hallmarks. PCOS is one of the main reasons of infertility because of these symptoms, especially the absence of ovulation, which can seriously reduce fertility. Although there is currently no known cure for PCOS, many of its symptoms can be successfully controlled with medication, lifestyle changes, and fertility therapies. A family history of PCOS or type-2 diabetes greatly raises the likelihood of getting the illness, even if its exact origin is yet unknown.

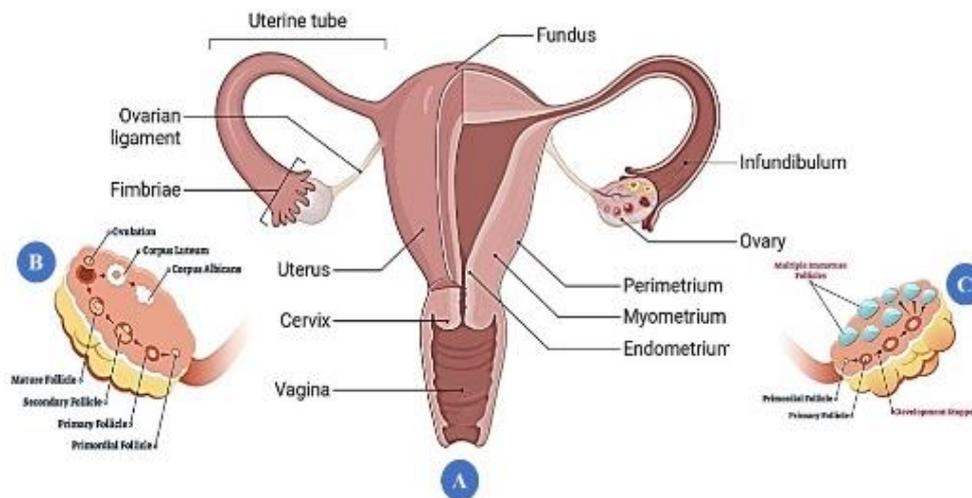


Figure 1: (A) Normal Anatomical Structure of Female Reproductive System, (B) Normal Ovary and (C) Polycystic Ovary (Image Modified from BioRender)

THE POSSIBILITY OF THE PROBLEM

Being one of the most prevalent hormonal conditions affecting women of reproductive age, PCOS poses a significant public health

risk. 8–13% of the population is thought to be affected, and because of variations in symptom presentation and diagnostic difficulties, up to 70% of cases go undetected. Certain ethnic groups have a

disproportionately high prevalence of PCOS and frequently face more serious problems, particularly those pertaining to metabolic health.

Beyond just physical health, the illness has an influence on social connections and mental health. Anxiety, depression, and social shame can result from symptoms including obesity, infertility, and issues with one's appearance. Relationships, family dynamics, and professional life are all impacted by these psychological and social issues, which exacerbate the problems experienced by those with PCOS.

SYMPTOMS OF PCOS

The symptoms of PCOS vary widely among individuals and may evolve over time, often without a clear trigger. Common symptoms of PCOS are shown below in the Figure 2.



Figure 2: General symptoms of PCOS

In addition to these symptoms, PCOS is also associated with an increased risk of developing other health conditions as in Figure 3.



Figure 3: PCOS associated health issues

The psychological effects of PCOS, including anxiety, depression, and a negative body image, are often exacerbated by symptoms like infertility and unwanted hair growth. These can lead to social stigmatization, which negatively impacts multiple aspects of life, including family, social interactions, and community involvement.

DIAGNOSIS OF PCOS

Diagnosing PCOS involves meeting at least two of the following criteria:

1. Signs or symptoms of elevated androgen levels, such as excessive facial or body hair, hair thinning, acne, or high testosterone levels in the blood, provided other causes are excluded.
2. Irregular or absent menstrual cycles, after ruling out other possible causes.
3. Polycystic ovaries are visible on an ultrasound scan.

Blood testing can help with diagnosis by detecting hormonal abnormalities such as increased levels of testosterone, estrogen, luteinizing hormone (LH), insulin, or anti-Mullerian hormone (AMH). These

indicators do not, however, appear in every PCOS instances. Healthcare professionals also take into account risk factors such as a family history of PCOS or type 2 diabetes, the normal irregularity of menstrual cycles throughout puberty or menopause, and the familial inclination for polycystic ovaries when diagnosing PCOS. Furthermore, some women with PCOS may not have polycystic ovaries, therefore the sight of these ovaries on ultrasound is not always indicative.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

While there is no cure for PCOS, various treatments are available to alleviate its symptoms and improve quality of life. Individuals experiencing irregular periods, infertility, or excessive acne and hair growth should consult a healthcare professional for tailored management strategies. Lifestyle modifications, such as adopting a healthy diet and engaging in regular physical activity, are foundational approaches to managing PCOS. These changes can help reduce weight and lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Medical interventions often include hormonal contraceptives, which regulate menstrual cycles and mitigate symptoms like acne and hirsutism. Other medications may be prescribed to address specific symptoms, such as excessive hair growth or skin issues. For women struggling with infertility due to PCOS, treatments range

from lifestyle adjustments and medications to surgical options designed to stimulate regular ovulation. In-vitro fertilization (IVF) is another option, though it carries certain risks and may not be suitable for all patients.

CONCLUSION

Polycystic ovary syndrome is a complex condition with widespread implications for physical, mental, and reproductive health. Despite being a chronic disorder, effective management strategies, including lifestyle changes and medical treatments, can significantly reduce its impact. Greater awareness, timely diagnosis, and personalized care are essential to improving outcomes and quality of life for women living with PCOS.

**All the information is adopted from WHO website*

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