

PCOS DIET & LIFESTYLE FOR FERTILITY AND SYMPTOM MANAGEMENT

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a metabolic condition affecting 1 in 10 pre-menopausal women.

The Rotterdam Diagnostic diagnoses a woman with PCOS if 2/3 of the following underlying features are met:

- **Hyperandrogenism**- where there are increased levels of androgen (male) hormones (this can lead to acne, excess body hair and loss of hair from the scalp)
- **Oligo- or anovulation**- where ovulation is irregular. Irregular cycles may be present.
- **Polycystic ovaries** - viewed on ultrasound, the appearance of numerous cysts in the ovaries when incomplete ovulation occurs.

While the cause is not fully known, research in the last 20 years is showing that insulin resistance is a major underlying cause of PCOS. PCOS can impact a woman from puberty to menopause. It can impact on fertility, weight, mental health, and also increase the risk of diabetes and heart disease.

Common symptoms

- Acne
- Excess facial or body hair
- Balding on scalp
- Weight gain, especially around belly
- Irregular periods or missing periods
- Infertility

DIET AND LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE SYMPTOMS AND FERTILITY

Balancing blood sugar and insulin resistance

70-80% of women with PCOS have insulin resistance, meaning their blood sugar levels remain high after consuming carbohydrates, instead of it being used as energy for the body. This means the pancreas has to work harder to produce more insulin to manage the blood sugar levels. High insulin levels can promote fat storage around the abdomen, and increase the production of androgens in the ovaries, worsening PCOS symptoms and fertility.

- Avoid high sugar soft drinks and juices
- Reduce high sugar foods such as cakes, lollies and sweet biscuits
- Choose low glycaemic index (GI) carbohydrates to reduce spikes in blood sugar levels and keep you fuller for longer. Roller-meal Nshima, wholegrain breads, basmati rice, pasta.
- Balance your plate following the plate model to reduce your blood sugar levels and balance your hormones, while staying full

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Healthy fats

Choosing healthy fats can help keep you satiated, reduce inflammation, improve fertility and insulin levels. They also help to reduce cholesterol.

- Choose extra-virgin olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds in moderation
- Flaxseeds are a readily available source of healthy fats, consider an omega 3 supplement too.
- Reduce saturated and trans fats: butter, coconut oil, animal fats, highly processed cakes and sweets

Exercise

Exercise is important for PCOS management. It can lower insulin levels, reduce inflammation and also improve stress and sleep quality.

- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise on most days.
- Increase unplanned activity, such as parking further away and walking, taking the stairs or having breaks from your desk!

Managing stress, sleep and mental health

Sleep and stress management are key components of PCOS management. Managing PCOS symptoms and fertility can also be challenging. Women with PCOS are at a higher risk of depression, anxiety and eating disorders. Working alongside a team with mental health support is highly beneficial if you are struggling with these.

Supplementation

Some supplements and medications may help improve your PCOS symptoms and fertility. Speak to your doctor and dietitian for the best options for you. Metformin is an insulin sensitising medication commonly used to manage symptoms and promote fertility. Some supplements which may be helpful in improving insulin sensitivity, ovulation and lowering inflammation include:

- Omega 3s (1000-3000mg/day)
- Vitamin D (dosage based on bloods to optimise blood levels)
- Tailored prenatal supplement
- Inositol (speak to dietitian for correct form and dosage for you, usual ranges between 2000-4000mg/day)
- N-Acetyl Cysteine (NAC) (1200-1800mg/day)
- Magnesium (300-400mg, 1 hr before bed)

Sample Daily Intake

Breakfast: 2 slice wholegrain bread + 2 tablespoons peanut butter + 1 boiled egg

Snack: 1 Banana + 1 Handful of Groundnuts

Lunch: 1 1/2 cups Rollermeal Nshima + 100g Grilled Fish + 2 cups Vishashi

Snack: 1 cup of tea

Dinner: 1 cup Rice + 2 cups salad + 100g Roast Chicken

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Non-Starchy Vegetables

Aim for 2-3 serves

- 1 cup salad
- 1/2 cups cooked

Protein

Aim for 1-2 serves

- 100-150g Red/White Meat
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup beans
- 40g Cheese
- 1 cup dairy

Healthy Fats

Aim for 1 serve

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 2 tablespoons nuts/seeds
- 1/4 Avocado

Wholegrain, Cereals & Starchy Vegetables

Aim for 2-4 serves

- 1/4 cup Nshima
- 1/3 cup Rice/Cereal
- 1/2 cup Pasta
- 1 slice bread
- 1/2 cup Starchy Veg
- 1 cob Maize

