



Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS): Tip of the Iceberg of Looming Health Problems

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) varies greatly among the 5-10% of reproductive-aged women affected and may be a harbinger of more serious medical problems later in life. The main clinical features include menstrual irregularities, difficulty becoming pregnant, acne, and undesired hair growth. Some women with PCOS may later develop metabolic syndrome which is a constellation of metabolic disorders that increase the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases (heart attacks and strokes), and also uterine cancer. A family history of these diseases further raises concerns.

Blood tests from women with PCOS frequently demonstrate elevated male hormones such as testosterone which causes thinning of scalp hair, undesired hair growth in other areas, and acne. Blood sugar and insulin trend higher and this also contributes to the inability to ovulate. Cholesterol may be elevated too. This lethal combination over many years may lead to the development of the aforementioned major medical problems.

We have always preached fat loss to PCOS patients who are above their ideal body weight—frequent intensive exercise and a low glycemic diet (low in sugars & starches). Recent studies have shown that taking 100 mg of CoQ10 supplement daily can help improve the metabolic abnormalities. Birth control pills normalize periods and decrease testosterone which improves skin and hair concerns. They also reduce excessive or prolonged menstruation now as well as reduce the risk of uterine cancer far into the future. Some PCOS patients will benefit from early intervention with a diabetes drug called Metformin. Finally, those women unable to conceive spontaneously should be referred to an infertility subspecialist for treatment.

Got PCOS? It's not just about your period being messed up. Now you're better informed to take action to prevent or at least minimize major medical issues in your future.

Wishing you good health,

Scott Kramer MD