

P.C.O.S. (polycystic ovarian syndrome)

Irregular menses (periods) is a problem encountered by many teenage girls. In fact, it is not unusual for menses to be irregular for 2 to 5 years after the first period. Some young women skip periods, have periods that come too close together, bleed too much, or bleed too long. One of the syndromes that can cause irregular menses and is being diagnosed more frequently in the teenage population is Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome.

What is PCOS?

Poly cystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a mild hormone imbalance that can cause irregular periods, unwanted hair growth, and acne. It can be mild or severe. This is a common condition that begins during the teenage years. In fact, almost 1 out of 15 women have PCOS.

What are the signs and the range of symptoms of PCOS?

- Irregular periods- periods that come every few months, not at all. Or all too frequently
- Extra hair on your face or other parts of your body
- Acne
- Weight gain and/or trouble losing weight
- Patches of dark skin on the back of your neck and other areas
- Increased insulin levels

What causes PCOS?

PCOS is caused by an imbalance in the hormones (chemical messengers) in your brain and your ovaries. The pituitary gland, in your brain, makes luteinizing hormone and follicle-stimulation hormone (LH and FSH). These are the messengers that tell the ovaries to make other hormones, estrogen, and progesterone, and all normal ovaries also make a bit of the androgen testosterone. PCOS occurs when these hormones don't communicate appropriately. Specifically, the pituitary gland makes too much LH, which in turn causes your ovaries to start to make extra testosterone.

Why are my periods so irregular?

The LH surge is supposed to come once a month. Instead, the LH level remains high and this, combined with the extra testosterone in your blood, keeps you from ovulating. When you do not ovulate, your periods will be irregular and can take on the patterns described above.

What does the term polycystic mean?

The term "polycystic ovaries" means that there may be tiny cysts inside your ovaries. Not all women with PCOS have these cysts. Even if you do have them, they are not harmful and do not need to be removed.

Why do I get acne and/or extra hair on my body?

Acne and extra hair on your face and body can be a result of too much testosterone. If you have PCOS, your ovaries make a little bit more than they are supposed to, or your body is more sensitive to the testosterone. Testosterone tells your hair follicles to "turn on," causing hair growth it also affects skin cells, causing acne.

Can I have kids some day?

Women with PCOS have a normal uterus and healthy eggs. Some women have trouble getting pregnant, and some have no trouble at all. There are numerous methods to help women with PCOS achieve a pregnancy.

What can I do about PCOS?

There are excellent long-term medications to help manage irregular periods, hair growth, and acne. They include; hormone treatment, acne treatments, and insulin-sensitizing medications. Diet and exercise are also very important. The most common and effective form of hormone treatment is the birth control pill. By taking this form of hormone replacement, you can keep your hormone levels in balance, which helps your periods to come on a regular basis; and improve acne and lessen hair growth. Additional methods may also help to limit hair growth.

A new approach, which helps the body lower the insulin level, is the medication called Metformin. It is particularly helpful in girls who have high levels of insulin or have pre-diabetes. Occasionally, it is necessary to take both birth control pills and Metformin.

Young women with prolonged irregular menses should seek consultation with a gynecologist. A careful work-up and correct diagnosis will provide the opportunity for early treatment and prevent consequences from developing.