

Fox Valley Reproductive Medicine (FVRM) is an independently physician-owned organization.

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) – How unusual is it?

By Mark Faustich, MD
The Fertility Clinic
Fox Valley Reproductive Medicine

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) is a condition in which the ovaries secrete abnormally high amounts of androgens (male hormones) that often cause problems with ovulation. Women with PCOS have enlarged ovaries which contain multiple, small cysts. Although PCOS, also called Stein-Leventhal syndrome, can be completely without symptoms, it more often is associated with symptoms such as irregular periods or amenorrhea (no periods), weight gain or obesity, excessive hair or abnormal hair growth, acne, and oily skin.

How many women have Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)?

About one in ten women of childbearing age has PCOS. It can occur in girls as young as 11 years old. PCOS is the most common cause of female infertility (not being able to get pregnant).

What causes Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)?

The cause of PCOS is unknown. Most researchers think that more than one factor could play a role in developing PCOS. Genes are thought to be one factor. Women with PCOS tend to have a mother or sister with PCOS. Researchers also think insulin could 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. For many women with PCOS, their bodies have problems using insulin so that too much insulin is in the body. Excess insulin appears to increase production of androgen. This hormone is made in fat cells, the ovaries, and the adrenal gland. Levels of androgen that are higher than normal can lead to acne, excessive hair growth, weight gain, and problems with ovulation.

Does Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) run in families?

Most researchers and **reproductive endocrinology experts think** that PCOS runs in families. Women with PCOS tend to have a mother or sister with PCOS. Still, there is no proof that PCOS is inherited.

What are the symptoms of Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)?

Not all women with PCOS share the same symptoms. These are some of the symptoms of PCOS:

- infrequent menstrual periods, no menstrual periods, and/or irregular bleeding
- female infertility (not able to get pregnant) due to not ovulating
- increased hair growth on the face, chest, stomach, back, thumbs, or toes—a condition called hirsutism (HER-suh-tiz-um)
- ovarian cysts
- acne, oily skin, or dandruff
- weight gain or obesity, usually carrying extra weight around the waist
- insulin resistance or type 2 diabetes
- high cholesterol
- high blood pressure
- male-pattern baldness or thinning hair
- patches of thickened and dark brown or black skin on the neck, arms, breasts, or thighs
- skin tags, or tiny excess flaps of skin in the armpits or neck area
- pelvic pain
- anxiety or depression due to appearance and/or infertility
- sleep apnea—excessive snoring and times when breathing stops while asleep

Call FVRM at 920-560-5585 or your personal primary care physician with questions or for the most appropriate treatment option for your situation.