

# Eating Well with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

What is PCOS?

PCOS is a hormone disorder where the woman's body makes too much male hormone. This often prevents normal ovulation (the monthly release of the egg from the ovary), which can cause periods to become irregular or stop altogether. It can also make it difficult to get pregnant. Common symptoms of PCOS may include:

- | weight gain (especially around the belly)
- | poor blood glucose control
- | high blood pressure
- | high cholesterol
- | high triglycerides (fat in the blood)
- | excess body or facial hair (hirsutism)
- | acne.

These can lead to a higher risk for developing metabolic syndrome, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and sleep apnea.

PCOS affects 6-10% of women. It may run in families. Doctors don't know what causes PCOS, and treatment usually focuses on managing the symptoms above.



## Steps you can take

There is no specific diet that can prevent or treat PCOS. However, eating well and being active can help manage some of the symptoms of PCOS and the effects they have on your health.

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### Aim for a healthy weight:

- | Follow “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide” [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide) to get the right amount and type of food to support a healthy weight.
- | If you are overweight, a 5-10% weight loss can improve many of the symptoms of PCOS.
- | Weight loss can reduce the amount of male hormone levels and regulate your period, which can make it easier to get pregnant.

### Lower your risk of heart disease:

- | Choose healthy fats instead of unhealthy fats.
  - | Eat at least two servings of fatty fish per week, such as salmon, mackerel, herring, char, trout or sardines, to help you get enough omega-3 fatty acids.
  - | Use healthy fats and oils, like canola, sunflower or olive oil, or non-hydrogenated margarine instead of butter, shortening or lard.
  - | Choose foods that are lower in saturated fat, which is an unhealthy fat. Examples are: lean meats, skinless poultry, lower fat milk and milk products, legumes (beans, peas and lentils), tofu, unsalted nuts, seeds and their butters.
  - | Read labels to avoid products made with trans, hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated fats. These are unhealthy fats.
- | Bake, broil, steam and stir-fry foods instead of frying or deep frying. Cooking and preparing foods using less fat can help to manage your weight, which will help to control your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- | See Additional Resources for more details.

### Keep your blood glucose and insulin levels under control:

- | Don’t skip meals!
  - | Eat three meals per day at regular times, and include breakfast.
  - | Space meals no more than 6 hours apart.
  - | Some people may benefit from a healthy snack, especially if meals are spaced far apart.
  - | For healthy snack ideas, see Additional Resources.

- | Choose high fibre foods more often. Fibre prevents your blood glucose levels from rising too quickly, which gives you better blood glucose control.
  - | Try brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, whole grain breads, oats, barley, bulgur or quinoa.
  - | Look for products that say “whole grain” on the package and contain 4 grams of fibre or more per serving.
  - | Limit white or refined grain products, which are often low in fibre.
- | Choose low glycemic index (GI) foods more often. Low GI foods may help to lower your risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes. They may also help you to lose weight by helping you to feel fuller longer. Many high fibre foods are also low GI foods.
  - | For more information on the glycemic index, see Additional Resources.
- | Include healthy protein foods at your meals and snacks to feel fuller longer.
- | Healthy protein foods include:
  - | lean meats and skinless poultry
  - | fish
  - | tofu
  - | legumes (beans, peas and lentils)
  - | unsalted nuts and seeds (and their butters)
  - | eggs
  - | lower fat milk and milk products, like yogurt and cheese.

#### Exercise regularly:

- | Aim for at least 150 minutes (2 ½ hours) of moderate activity per week, in sessions of 10 minutes or more.
- | If you are not active, check with your doctor before starting. If you are already active, consider changing your routine or trying a new activity.
- | See Additional Resources for more ideas on being active.

#### Keep track of your mood:

- | Some women feel depressed and anxious as they face the challenges of living with PCOS.
- | If you are feeling depressed or anxious, speak to your doctor for more support.

Skip buying natural health products:

- | Evidence does not show that taking any dietary supplements will help with the symptoms of PCOS.



## Additional Resources

- | Dietitians of Canada - find a variety of tools to help you assess your food choices, plan menus, analyze recipes, and test your nutrition knowledge: [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

For type 2 diabetes see the following fact sheets from the Canadian Diabetes Association:

- | This resource offers tips for healthy eating and diabetes prevention and management:  
[www.diabetes.ca/files/JTB17x\\_11\\_CPGO3\\_1103.pdf](http://www.diabetes.ca/files/JTB17x_11_CPGO3_1103.pdf)
- | This resource offers tips for dealing with diabetes:  
[www.diabetes.ca/files/type2basics.pdf](http://www.diabetes.ca/files/type2basics.pdf)
- | This resource explains the connection between cholesterol and diabetes and offers tips for improving both:  
[www.diabetes.ca/files/CholesterolToolFINALEng.pdf](http://www.diabetes.ca/files/CholesterolToolFINALEng.pdf)
- | If you already have diabetes, this resource provides some important information on exercising with type 2 diabetes:  
[www.diabetes.ca/files/physicalactivity.pdf](http://www.diabetes.ca/files/physicalactivity.pdf)

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