

## Polycystic Ovary Syndrome: *Patient Information*

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### What is PCOS?

***Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) affects one out of 16 women. It is a very common condition.***

- Women with PCOS have few and irregular periods from the onset and with time they may develop excess hair in the face and the body. They may also have darkening and coarsening of the skin around the neck and gain weight suddenly.
- All women produce some male hormones in their ovaries (called testosterone) and adrenals (called DHEA-S). Women with PCOS produce too much testosterone in their ovaries. Testosterone is the cause of excess hair growth in the face and body (hirsutism) and the loss of hair on the scalp.
- There are few other rare medical problems that present clinically similar to PCOS. These can be easily distinguished from PCOS by simple blood testing.
- PCOS can also be associated with insulin resistance (a risk factor for diabetes). Luckily, this also can be diagnosed and managed successfully.
- In the old days, the presence of the cysts in the ovaries was necessary to make the diagnosis of PCOS. Not any longer. Now the diagnosis of PCOS is based on blood tests.

***The most important aspect of the management of PCOS is the early and correct diagnosis.***

### What treatments are available?

- The most important component of PCOS therapy is the birth control pills (BCP). BCP therapy allows the ovaries to rest, so that they do not produce the male hormone testosterone. Women with PCOS have less hair growth during BCP treatment and they may even lose weight.
- The other treatments are individualized, based on the specific symptoms of the patients. Hirsutism can be treated with spironolactone and finasteride. Insulin resistance is treated with metformin (the other insulin sensitizers can cause weight gain). Weight gain can be managed with diet and medicines.
- Women with PCOS don't do well on low-fat / high-carbohydrate diets. They get excessive fluctuations in their blood sugar levels and feel tired and emotionally labile. It is best not to lower the dietary fat intake below 30 – 35 %.
- Women with PCOS don't easily lose weight with exercise because the high insulin levels prevent the breakdown of the fat-tissue. They need to exercise for at least 200 minutes a week (aerobic) to see a difference.

***These are unfair truths of PCOS.***

### **Can women with PCOS get pregnant?**

- Yes. Weight loss and metformin treatment help, but they may need help from an infertility specialist.
- Our PCOS clinic is specialized in making the correct diagnosis and managing all the medical and metabolic problems (Dr. Karakas, appointments; 916-734-2737).

### **What kind of research is being done at the UC Davis to improve the management of PCOS?**

- Our program has two major goals: First, to find a way to early diagnose the young women who are likely to become obese and diabetic. Second, to find safe and effective nutritional and medical approaches to treat them early-- before they develop the weight gain, excess hair growth and diabetes.

### **Where can you get more help and support?**

PCOS Support Groups are quite helpful in sharing information and creating a community.