Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

PCOS occurs when a woman’s hormones are not in balance. Normally, the body produces both progesterone and androgen. For women with PCOS, the levels of androgen, or male hormones, are higher than normal.

PCOS can make it more difficult for women to become pregnant. They may have missed or irregular menstrual cycles or periods. Small cysts, or fluid filled sacs, can also grow in the ovaries where eggs are made. These cysts make it hard for eggs to leave the ovary (called ovulation).

Risk of PCOS

Genetics play a role in PCOS. You are more at risk if you have a mother or sister with the condition. Insulin may also be linked to PCOS. Insulin is a hormone that controls how sugars and starches are changed into energy for the body. Higher levels of insulin can increase the amount of androgen in the body.

Signs of PCOS

You may have one or more of these signs:

- Infertility or not able to become pregnancy
- Irregular menstrual cycle (period)
- Pelvic pain
- More hair growth on the body
- Acne or oily skin, or dandruff

More on next page ➔
• Overweight or weight gain, especially around the waist
• Thick, dark patches of skin appear on the neck, armpits, skin folds, and on the inside of the upper leg.
• Less common symptoms may include thinning hair, tiny skin growths (skin tags) in the armpits or neck area.

Testing
After a physical exam and a pelvic exam, the doctor will take a medical history. You may also have one or more of these tests to check your health:
• Blood test, to check hormone and insulin levels
• Pelvic ultrasound, to check the ovaries and endometrium or lining of the uterus

Treatment
Treatment is used to control the signs of PCOS. Your treatment may include:
• Changes to exercise and eating to manage weight
• Birth control to manage menstrual cycles, lower androgen levels and clear acne
• Medicines to manage insulin levels, fertility or other signs of PCOS
• Surgery if medicines are not effective

Talk with your doctor or nurse about the questions you have about PCOS.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have any questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.