

# PCOS from the Root Up

A Real-Life Guide



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# Table of Contents

## 1. What is PCOS?

Understanding Your Symptoms .....	7
The Diagnosis Journey .....	9
The Diversity of PCOS & Your Unique Pattern .....	9
What Are The Origins of PCOS? .....	11
Understanding Your Hormones' Hierarchy .....	11
Myths and Misconceptions about PCOS .....	14
What You Can Do Today .....	16

## 2. What Causes PCOS?

The Symphony of Your Body: Three Co-Conductors .....	18
How These Conductors Create PCOS Symptoms .....	19
How This All Affects Your Menstrual Cycle .....	25
Breaking the Cycle: Points of Intervention .....	30
What You Can Do Today .....	30

## 3. Treating PCOS: what your doctor didn't tell you

Can PCOS Be Cured? .....	32
The Truth About Hormonal Birth Control .....	33
Other Medical Treatments .....	34
Questions to Ask Your Doctor .....	35
Holistic Options: Beyond Medication .....	37
What You Can Do Today .....	38

## 4. Lifestyle Changes for Hormone Balance

Managing Stress .....	40
Improving your Sleep .....	42
Creating a hormone friendly environment .....	43
Prioritizing Your Emotional Wellbeing .....	44
Nervous System Regulation: The Foundation of Healing .....	45
What You Can Do Today .....	48

# Table of Contents

## 5. Nutrition for Hormone Balance

Nurturing Your Relationship with Food .....	51
Addressing Inflammation Through Nutrition .....	52
Eating For Blood-Sugar Balancing .....	53
Supplementing For PCOS .....	59
Sample Meal Plan .....	60
What You Can Do Today .....	61

## 6. Exercise for PCOS

How Exercise Impacts Your Body and Hormones .....	63
The Importance of Muscle: Your Metabolic Engine .....	63
Choosing The Right Exercise .....	64
Beneficial Exercise Approaches for PCOS .....	65
Creating Your Movement Plan: Finding Balance .....	66
Sample Weekly Movement Plan .....	67
Exercise and Your Menstrual Cycle .....	68
What You Can Do Today .....	69

## 7. Tracking & Monitoring

What to track .....	71
Effective Tracking methods .....	74
Interpreting your data .....	75
What You Can Do Today .....	76

## 8. Common FAQs

77

This guide was designed to gently walk you through the complexities of PCOS. Think of it as more than just advice; it's an invitation to take charge of your health journey. We know how overwhelming and frustrating PCOS can be, but with each step you take towards understanding and managing this condition, you're not just treating symptoms; you're nurturing your overall well-being.

If you're someone who's been suffering from PCOS, you might feel like you've lost complete control of your body and have to simply endure your symptoms. But here's another way to look at it: your body is speaking a language, and we're here to help you translate it.

Our goal is to help you to take control of the reins and get your body back. We'll do this by working in harmony with your body's natural rhythms, not against them.

In here, we'll cover everything you need to know about PCOS that you might've missed at the doctor's office — from its root causes, origin, various treatment options, to the most common misconceptions about PCOS. In each section, we'll also give you practical steps you can start to immediately implement today. Rather than resisting and fighting against your body, we want to help you nourish it by understanding exactly what it needs. Beyond band-aid solutions, our approach is whole-body based and holistic, so you feel empowered with all the knowledge you need to take control of your healing journey.

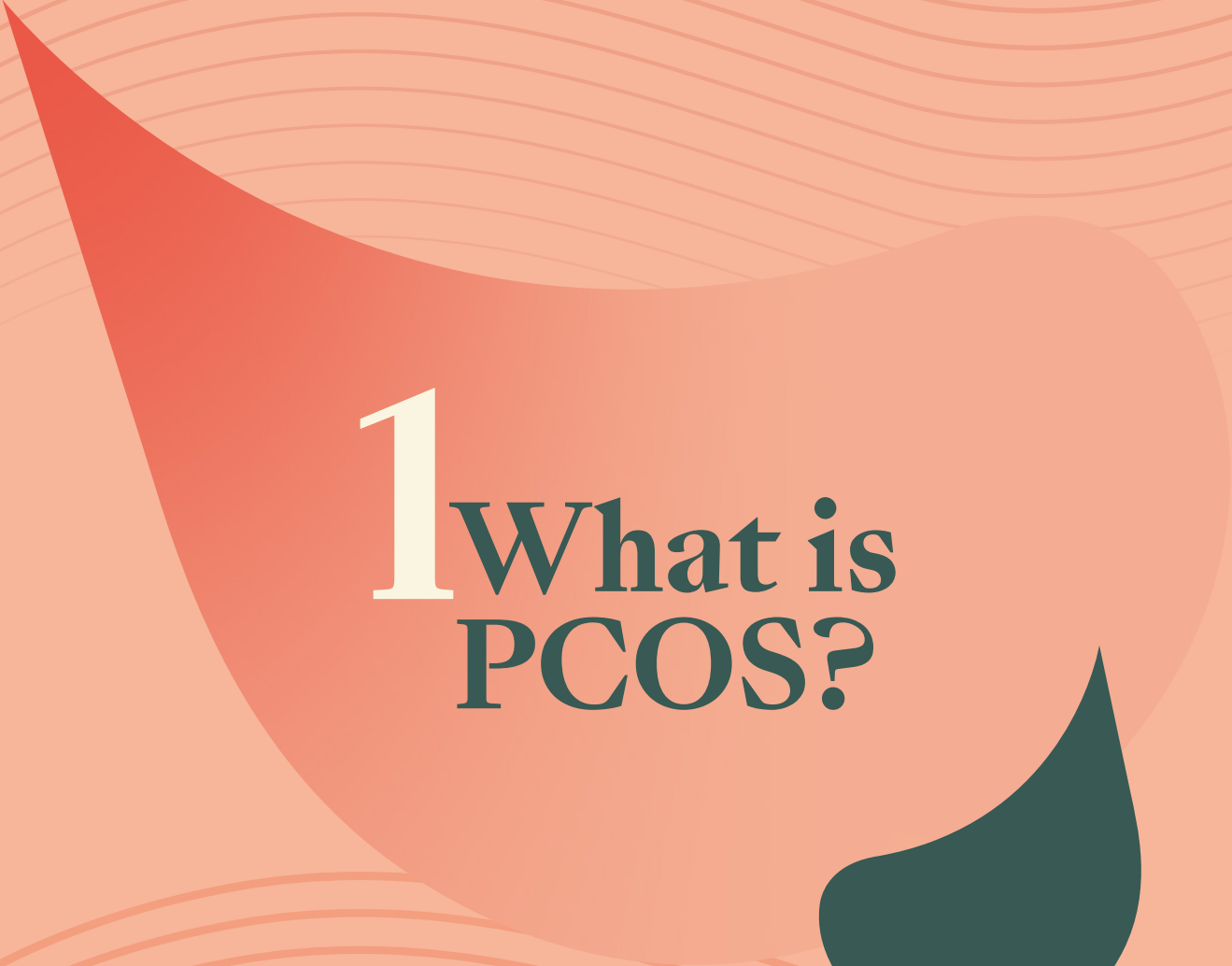
**We're glad you came.**



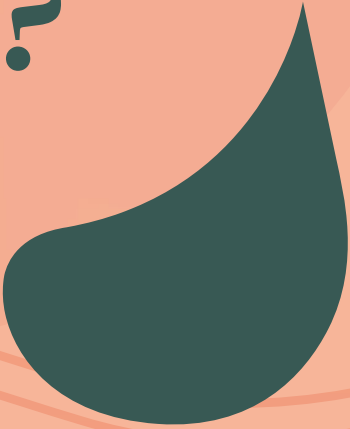
## Women Integrated Sexual Health Program

**This guide has been medically reviewed by the WISH Program at AUBMC.**

The Women Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) Program at the American University in Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC) is a program dedicated to empower, educate, and heal through addressing the multifaceted aspects of sexuality and sexual and reproductive health and rights.



# 1 What is PCOS?

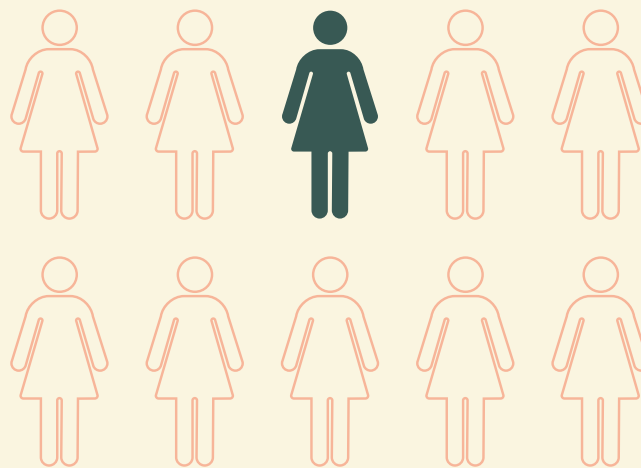


# What is PCOS?

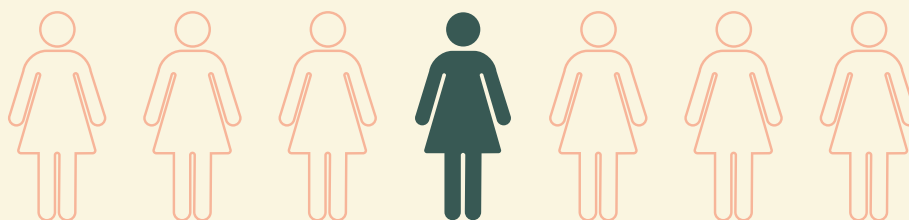
Let's start at the very beginning by defining Polycystic Ovary syndrome (PCOS) correctly. **PCOS is not just a reproductive issue; it's a metabolic and hormonal condition** that affects multiple aspects of your well-being.

Throughout this guide, we'll use the analogy of an orchestra when referring to your body to help illustrate some key points about your body. This orchestra needs different instruments (one of them being hormones) to play in harmony. In the case of someone with PCOS, some of these instruments are playing too loudly while others are too quiet, creating an imbalance in the body's natural rhythm.

What makes PCOS particularly unique is that **it manifests differently in each woman**—like a fingerprint, your PCOS experience is uniquely yours. While two women might both have PCOS, they could experience completely different symptoms, or similar symptoms but with varying degrees of severity. **This is why PCOS is often called a “spectrum” condition.**



**1/10 women of reproductive age affected Worldwide**

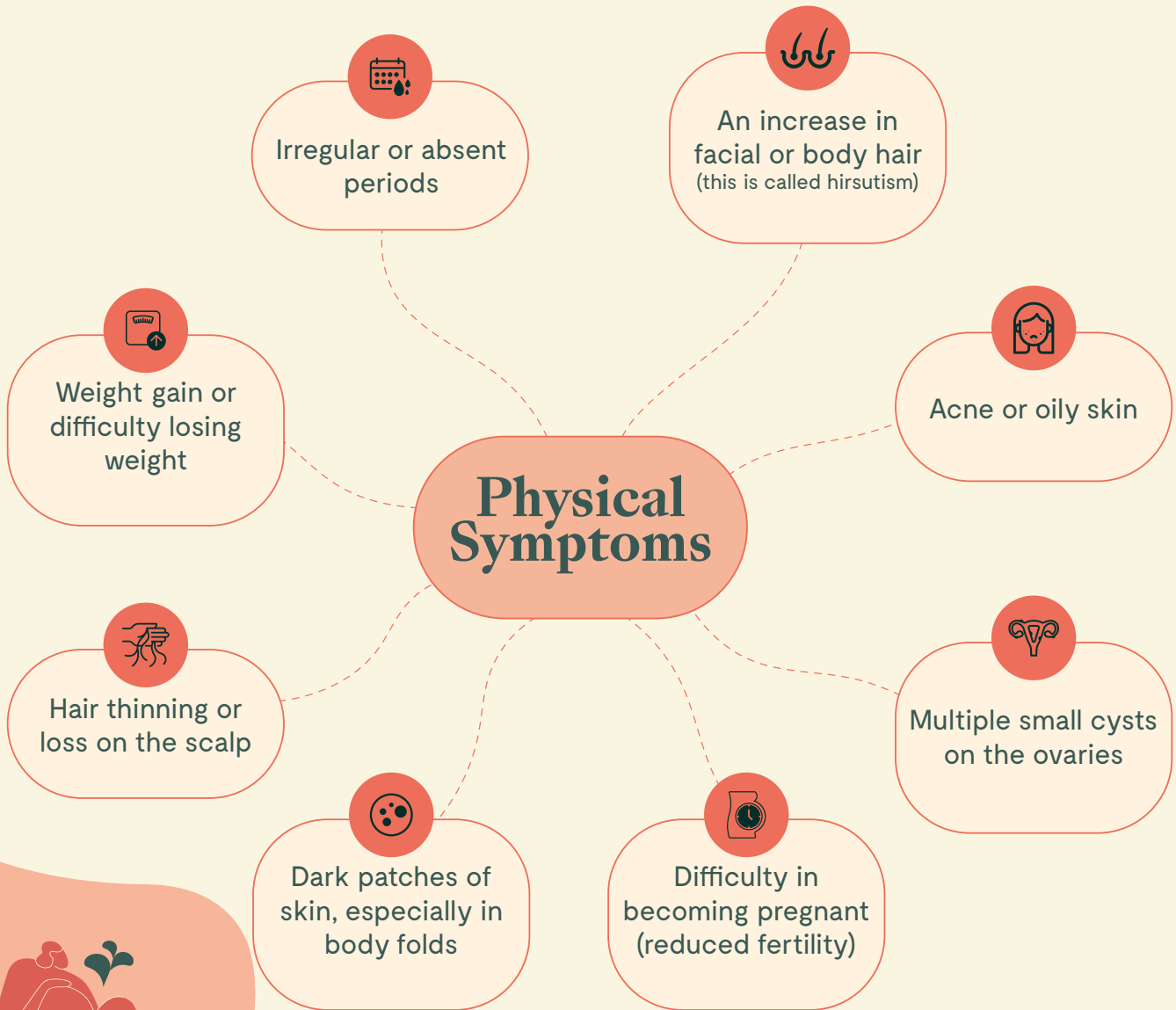


**1/7 women of reproductive age affected in parts of the Middle East**

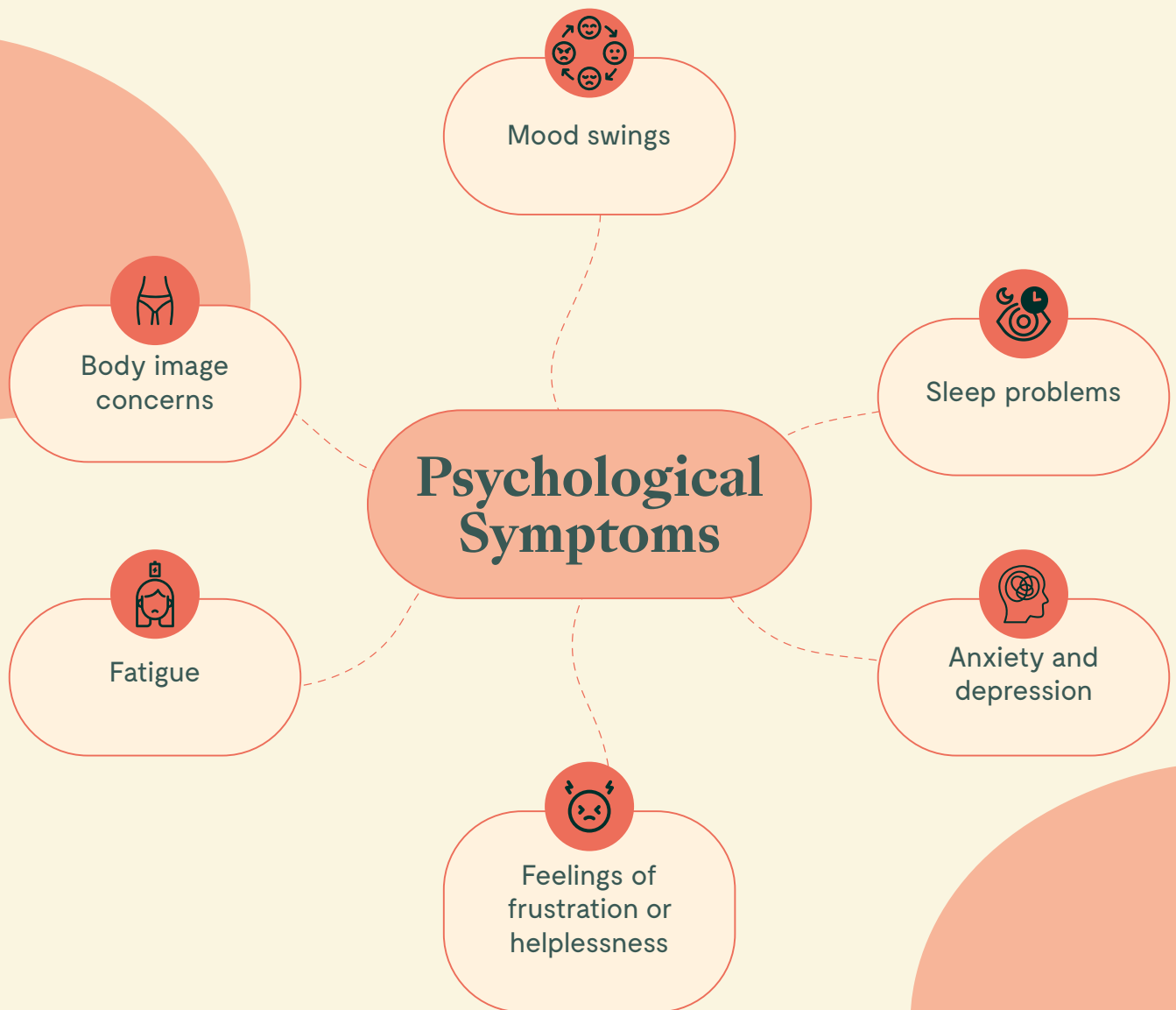
# Understanding Your Symptoms

One of the most important things to understand about PCOS is that not every woman will experience all of these symptoms, and the severity can vary greatly from person to person. This variation is completely normal and doesn't make your PCOS any more or less "real."

## Physical Symptoms:



## Psychological Symptoms:



### It's crucial to know that:

- You don't need to have all these symptoms to have PCOS.
- Your symptoms might change over time.
- What works for managing one woman's PCOS might not work for another.
- Stress, poor diet, lack of exercise, and irregular sleep patterns can make these symptoms worse.

# The Diagnosis Journey

In order to diagnose PCOS, doctors look for at least two out of these three symptoms to qualify for a diagnosis:

## Irregular menstrual cycles

Your periods might be unpredictable, too frequent, too far apart, or missing altogether.

## Signs of higher androgen levels (hyperandrogenism)

Your body produces androgens – a group of hormones (including testosterone) that are present in both men and women in different amounts. Androgens play important roles in bone health, energy, and sexual function, and in women with PCOS, they're often elevated, contributing to symptoms like irregular periods, acne, and excess hair growth, or elevated testosterone levels in your blood tests.

## Polycystic ovaries

You have multiple small cysts on your ovaries (imagine a string of small pearls along the edge of your ovaries) or increased ovarian volume.

Your doctor is also likely to request a hormone panel to assess your hormone levels.

## The Diversity of PCOS & Your Unique Pattern

Before we dive deeper into managing PCOS, there's something really important you need to understand: PCOS isn't a one-size-fits-all condition. Therefore, neither is its management.

## The Different Faces of PCOS

Medical research has identified four main patterns (called phenotypes) of PCOS, based on how symptoms present themselves:

Irregular periods  
+  
Higher androgen levels  
+  
Polycystic ovaries

Irregular periods  
+  
Higher androgen levels

Higher androgen levels  
+  
Polycystic ovaries

Irregular periods  
+  
Polycystic ovaries

But here's what makes PCOS even more complex: within these patterns, **different underlying factors may still be present and driving symptoms across these four phenotypes.**

## Common Underlying Factors

### Insulin Resistance

This is the most common underlying factor in PCOS, affecting about 70% of women with the condition. In PCOS, the body may not respond to insulin properly (this is known as insulin resistance), so the level of glucose is higher, which will lead to even higher levels of insulin. This can trigger:

- Weight gain, especially around the mid-section
- Intense cravings for carbs and sugar
- Fatigue after meals
- Difficulty losing weight
- Dark patches of skin (acanthosis nigricans)

### Inflammation

Women with PCOS have higher levels of inflammation in their bodies, which can show up as:

- Joint pain
- Skin issues
- Digestive problems
- Fatigue
- Headaches

### Hormonal Imbalance

While all women with PCOS have some form of hormonal imbalance, for some, this is the primary issue, leading to:

- Irregular periods
- Acne
- Hair growth changes
- Mood swings

Understanding these different patterns and underlying factors is crucial for identifying the right treatment for you and creating a personalized approach to managing your PCOS. We'll be explaining each one and diving deeper into them in subsequent sections.

# What Are the Origins of PCOS?

PCOS develops from a combination of genetic predisposition and environmental factors that create a “perfect storm” for hormonal imbalance. There is a strong genetic component to PCOS, with research showing a 30%–50% increased risk if your mother or sister has PCOS, and several genes related to hormone production, insulin signaling, and inflammation have been linked to PCOS. **However, having genetic predisposition doesn't guarantee developing PCOS.** Beyond genetics, other environmental factors and lifestyle come into play – and they can either activate or suppress these genetic tendencies.

The origins of PCOS involve multiple factors across different life stages:

## Prenatal influences

include maternal androgen exposure, stress levels, and blood sugar balance during pregnancy, suggesting PCOS may begin developing before birth.

## Early childhood factors

that increase risk include early puberty, childhood obesity, excessive sugar consumption, exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals, chronic stress, trauma, and poor sleep patterns.

## Triggering events

that can initiate or worsen symptoms include significant weight gain, major hormonal shifts, trauma, starting/stopping hormonal birth control, certain medications, and significant lifestyle changes.

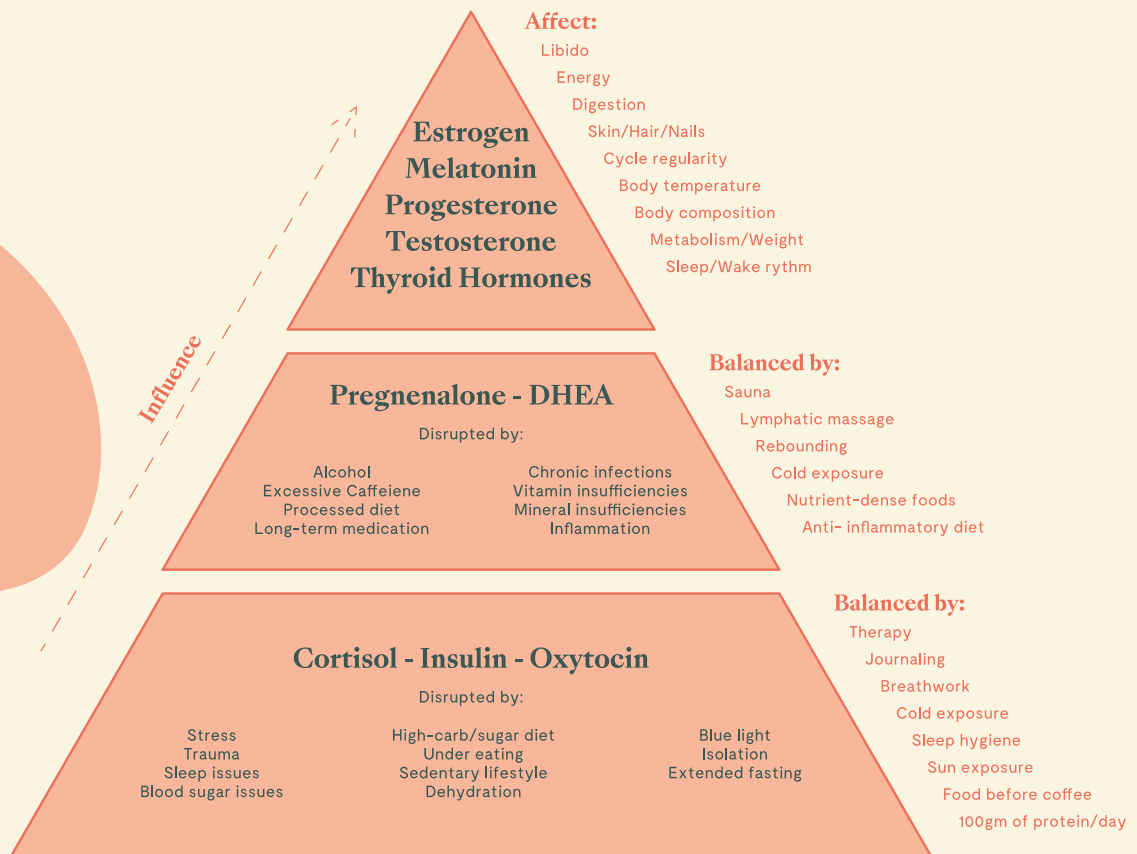
Understanding these potential triggers helps explain why some women develop symptoms earlier than others, even with similar genetic backgrounds.

# Understanding Your Hormones' Hierarchy

**Have you ever wondered what exactly are hormones? What do they do in the body?**

Your hormones work as chemical messengers that coordinate different functions in your body. To explain this, we'll invite you to think of your hormone system as a pyramid, in where hormones operate in hierarchical structure in your body.

When it comes to PCOS, it's easy to focus on the most obvious hormonal imbalances, like high testosterone or irregular cycles. But these aren't the root cause of your symptoms; **they're the result of deeper imbalances in your body's foundation.**



## Building from the Foundation: The Often Overlooked Base

At the base of your hormone health are the regulatory systems that influence everything else:

### Cortisol and your stress response:

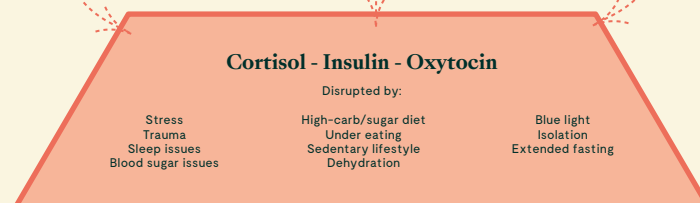
Cortisol is your body's primary stress hormone. When your nervous system is constantly in "alert mode" due to chronic stress, trauma, poor sleep, or blood sugar swings, it disrupts your entire hormone cascade. This isn't just about feeling stressed - it's about how your body physically responds to demands and challenges.

### Insulin and blood sugar balance:

This balance easily disrupted by inconsistent eating patterns, high-sugar diets, insufficient protein, sedentary lifestyle, and chronic stress. When insulin regulation is compromised, it directly affects how your ovaries function and how other hormones are produced.

### Oxytocin and connection:

This "bonding hormone" affects stress response, mood, and reproductive function. It's diminished by isolation and chronic stress, and enhanced through meaningful connection, touch, and pleasurable experiences, including intimacy and orgasms.



# The Middle Building Blocks

Built upon this foundation are important precursor hormones:

**Pregnenolone and DHEA:** These serve as building blocks for reproductive hormones. They're affected by inflammation, nutrient status, certain medications, and lifestyle factors like alcohol consumption.

## Pregnenolone - DHEA

Disrupted by:

Alcohol  
Excessive Caffeine  
Processed diet  
Long-term medication

Chronic infections  
Vitamin insufficiencies  
Mineral insufficiencies  
Inflammation

# The Top of the Pyramid: Where Symptoms Appear

At the top sit the hormones most commonly associated with PCOS symptoms:

## Estrogen, Progesterone, and Testosterone:

These directly affect ovulation, menstrual regularity, and visible PCOS symptoms. Their balance completely depends on the stability of all layers below.

Estrogen  
Melatonin  
Progesterone  
Testosterone  
Thyroid Hormones

## Thyroid Hormones and Melatonin:

Regulate metabolism, energy, and sleep-wake cycles - all commonly affected in PCOS.

# Building Your Foundation First

Many women work incredibly hard to manage their PCOS - changing their diets, taking numerous supplements, following strict exercise regimens - yet feel frustrated when symptoms persist. The missing piece? **They may be overlooking the importance of addressing the foundational elements through things like nervous system regulation, stress response management, blood sugar stabilization, quality sleep, intimacy, deeper human connections and pleasure.**

When your foundational hormones find better balance, the entire system can function more harmoniously, often leading to natural improvements in those top-tier hormones and visible PCOS symptoms.

# Common Myths and Misconceptions

## ***Myth 1: “You can’t get pregnant if you have PCOS.”***

### **Truth:**

While PCOS can make conception more challenging, many women with PCOS successfully conceive and have healthy pregnancies, either naturally or with medical support.

## ***Myth 2: “PCOS only affects overweight women.”***

### **Truth:**

PCOS can affect women of all body types and weights. While weight can influence symptoms, thin women can also have PCOS.

## ***Myth 3: “PCOS is rare.”***

### **Truth:**

As we mentioned earlier, it affects about 1 in 10 women, making it quite common. Plus, it’s estimated that up to 70% of women with PCOS remain undiagnosed worldwide.

## ***Myth 4: “PCOS only affects your reproductive system.”***

### **Truth:**

PCOS is a metabolic condition that can affect many systems in your body, including your cardiovascular health, insulin levels, and mental health.

## ***Myth 5: “There’s nothing you can do about PCOS.”***

### **Truth:**

While there’s no quick-fix cure in the traditional sense or pill you can easily take, PCOS symptoms can be effectively managed and even reversed through lifestyle changes, medication when needed, and proper medical support.

## ***Myth 6: “PCOS goes away after menopause.”***

### **Truth:**

Though symptoms may change over time, with some improving while others persist, it’s important to continue managing your PCOS even after menopause.

## ***Myth 7: “You must have cysts on your ovaries to have PCOS.”***

### **Truth:**

Remember the diagnostic criteria we discussed? You can have PCOS without having cysts on your ovaries, and you can have cysts on your ovaries without having PCOS.

# Remember

PCOS is not:

- ✗ A character flaw or personal failing
- ✗ Just “irregular periods”
- ✗ Something you caused
- ✗ A barrier to living a full and healthy life
- ✗ The same for everyone who has it

Understanding PCOS is your first step toward managing it effectively. In the following sections, we'll explore various management strategies, lifestyle modifications, and treatment options to help you take control of this journey

## What We'll Cover in This Guide

In this guide, we'll focus most deeply on managing:

- ✓ Insulin resistance (since it affects the majority of women with PCOS)
- ✓ Overall hormonal balance
- ✓ Inflammation reduction
- ✓ Common symptoms like irregular periods, acne, and unwanted hair growth



# What You Can Do Today: Start Your PCOS Journal

Now that you understand the basics of PCOS, creating your own symptom journal is a practical step you can take today to start taking control of your health journey.

## This will be your valuable tool for:

1. Understanding your unique PCOS pattern
2. Tracking your menstrual cycle
3. Documenting your symptoms
4. Identifying potential triggers
5. Having more productive conversations with your healthcare providers

## Simple Template to Use:

**Date:** [Today's date]

**Last period:** [Date]

**Current symptoms:**

- Physical symptoms: [List them]
- Emotional symptoms: [List them]
- Energy levels (1-10): [Rate them]
- Sleep quality (1-10): [Rate it]
- Notable events or changes: [Write out whatever patterns you've noticed]
- Questions for my doctor: [List them]

## Remember

You don't need a fancy journal. A simple notebook or notes app on your phone will do. The key is to start today and make it a daily habit.

## Tip

Set a daily reminder on your phone for the same time each day to help you remember to log your symptoms. Even five minutes of journaling can make a difference!



# 2 What Causes PCOS?

A Journey Inside Your Body

# What Causes PCOS?

Now that the concept of PCOS makes a little more sense, let's dive into why it develops and how your body's intricate systems play a role in this condition. Remember, your body is an ecosystem, so when something is out of balance, it's important to zoom out and take a broader look at the whole picture. We know this might feel overwhelming, but we'll be breaking down complex concepts into pieces that make sense.

## The Symphony of Your Body: Three Co-Conductors

Picture your body's systems like an orchestra performing a complex symphony. Each instrument has its unique sound, but it's the harmonious flow between them that creates beautiful music. In this analogy, the "musicians" are your individual cells, tissues, and organs throughout your body – each playing their part in keeping your body functioning properly.

**What makes this orchestra special is that, rather than having a single conductor, your body has three co-conductors who work together, constantly communicating and coordinating:**

### The Endocrine System Conductor

This conductor sends written notes (hormones) to coordinate everything from your energy levels to your reproductive cycle. These hormone messages travel through your bloodstream, carrying important instructions to different parts of your body. **In PCOS, the endocrine conductor often sends too many androgen messages and struggles with insulin signaling.**

### The Immune System Conductor

This conductor focuses on protection, sending messages that tell certain "musicians" (like white blood cells) to defend against threats. **In PCOS, this conductor often signals for more inflammation than necessary, creating a persistent background disruption.**

### The Nervous System Conductor

This conductor uses a baton (electrical signals) to communicate instantly with musicians, directing specific cells to respond immediately – like telling your heart to beat faster during exercise or your muscles to tense in response to stress. **In PCOS, the nervous conductor frequently keeps the stress response playing too loudly and for too long.**

Despite its name, **Polycystic Ovary Syndrome isn't just about your ovaries – it's about how these three conducting systems miscommunicate and affect your entire body.** Understanding this helps explain why PCOS can affect so many aspects of your health and why treating it requires a whole-body approach.

# The Endocrine System Conductor: Insulin Resistance and Hormone Imbalance

Your metabolism is one of the most important sections of the orchestra. It responds to all three conductors:

## The Endocrine System Conductor

sends hormones like insulin, thyroid hormones, and cortisol that directly regulate how quickly or slowly the metabolic section plays.

## The Nervous System Conductor

sends immediate signals that can speed up or slow down metabolic processes in response to stress or activity.

## The Immune System Conductor

influences metabolism through inflammatory signals that can alter how cells respond to insulin and process energy.

In PCOS, this metabolic section often doesn't respond properly to the conductors' directions – particularly to insulin signals from the endocrine conductor. This is what we call **insulin resistance**, and it's often the first domino to fall in the PCOS process.

Imagine insulin as a key that unlocks your cells to let sugar in from your bloodstream. In insulin resistance, these locks become rusty – the key doesn't work as well anymore. As a result, your body produces more and more keys (insulin), trying desperately to open those locks.

This excess insulin floating around in your bloodstream does more than just affect your blood sugar. It's like an overenthusiastic messenger that starts interfering with other conversations in your body. It can:

- Tell your ovaries to produce more testosterone
- Disrupt the delicate balance of other hormones
- Trigger inflammation throughout your body
- Make it harder to maintain a healthy weight



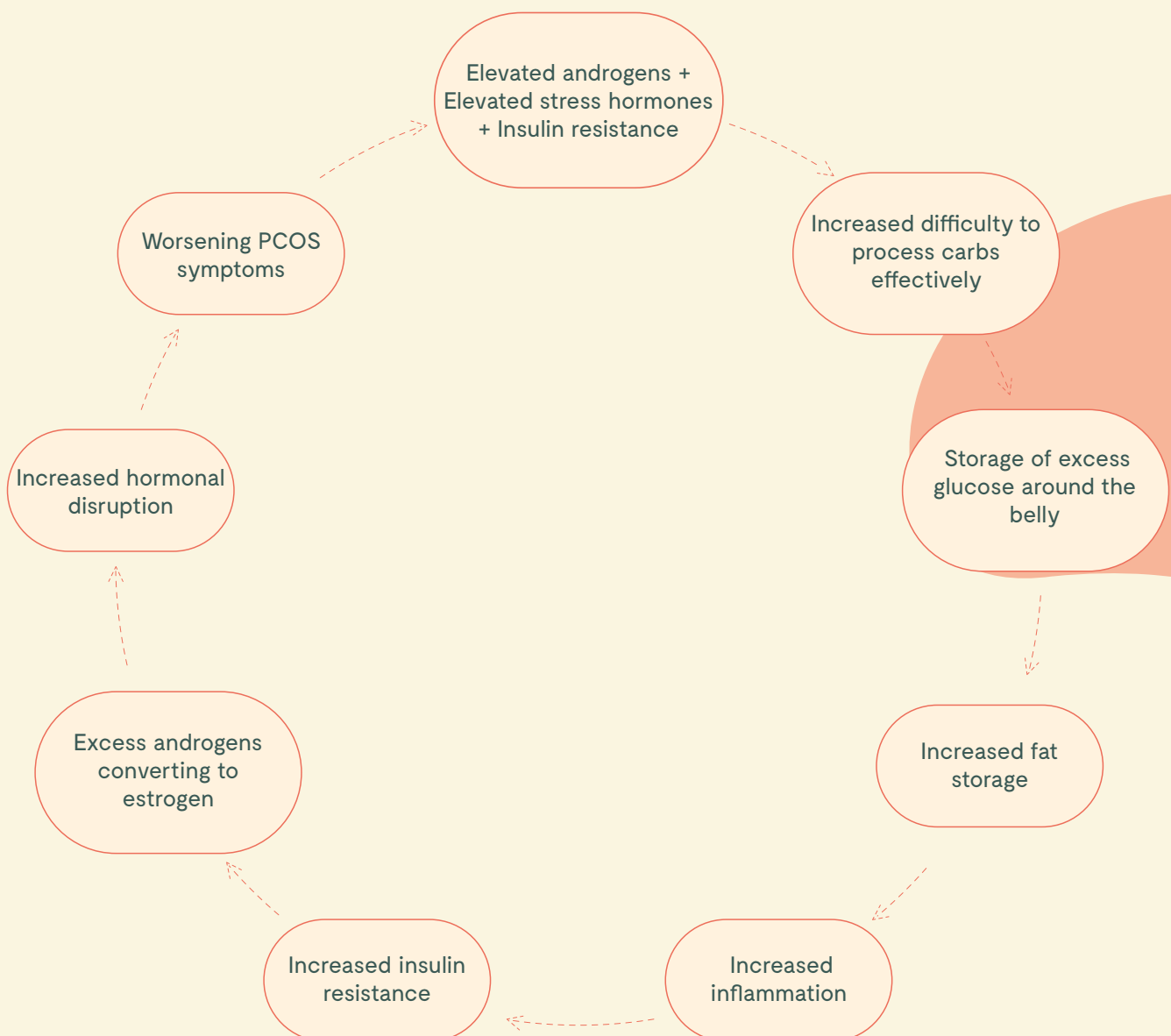
Think of it as turning up the volume on one instrument in our orchestra so loud that it drowns out the other instruments. Everything gets out of sync. This explains why many women with PCOS struggle with weight management and why simple calorie restriction often fails – it doesn't address the underlying hormone imbalances that promote fat storage and resist fat loss.

## Weight Changes and Management in PCOS

The relationship between PCOS and weight is complex and directly connected to the insulin resistance we just discussed. Indeed, many women with PCOS notice they tend to gain weight more easily than others, particularly around their midsection. This isn't about willpower – it's a direct result of how the hormonal orchestra is playing in your body.

### The Belly Fat Loop

That stubborn belly fat, which doctors call “visceral fat,” is actually metabolically active – think of it as an extra musician that wasn't invited to join the orchestra but showed up anyway and started playing its own tune.



## Weight Management for PCOS

Those intense cravings you experience aren't just a lack of willpower – they're driven by insulin resistance. When your cells can't properly use insulin to get glucose for energy, your body sends urgent "I'm starving!" signals to your brain, particularly for carbohydrates. This happens even if you've just eaten, leading to persistent hunger and cravings

**Simple calorie restriction often fails because it doesn't address these underlying hormone imbalances.**

When you severely restrict calories, your body perceives it as a threat and:

- Slows down your metabolism to conserve energy
- Increases stress hormones, which promote fat storage
- Intensifies cravings due to insulin resistance
- Makes your cells even more resistant to insulin

This explains why women with PCOS often gain weight easily but struggle to lose it. Their bodies are caught in a cycle of hormone imbalances that promote fat storage and resist fat loss. Breaking this cycle requires addressing the root cause: insulin resistance and hormone balance.

## The Immune System Conductor: Chronic Inflammation

The second key factor in PCOS is chronic inflammation, directed by the immune system conductor. Subtle but persistent, it can feel like a whisper of stress throughout your body. It's similar to having background noise that you might not notice consciously, but it affects everything else you're trying to hear. Your immune system conductor is essentially keeping the warning signals playing at a low volume all the time.

This persistent inflammation can:

- Make insulin resistance worse
- Affect how your hormones work
- Influence your mood and energy levels
- Impact your fertility

It's a bit like having a slight fever all the time – your body is working harder than it needs to, using up energy and resources that could be better spent elsewhere. You might feel this as unexplained fatigue, brain fog, or general discomfort that's hard to pinpoint.



# The Nervous System Conductor: The Effects of Dysregulation

## Stress and Cortisol's Effects

**First things first: stress doesn't happen in the mind, it's a cascade of physiological responses in the body.** Let's dive into what that means exactly.

In our fast-paced world, your body's stress response system often works overtime. Imagine you're driving through traffic and running late for an important meeting. Your nervous system conductor immediately signals for the release of stress hormones, particularly cortisol, your body's primary stress hormone.

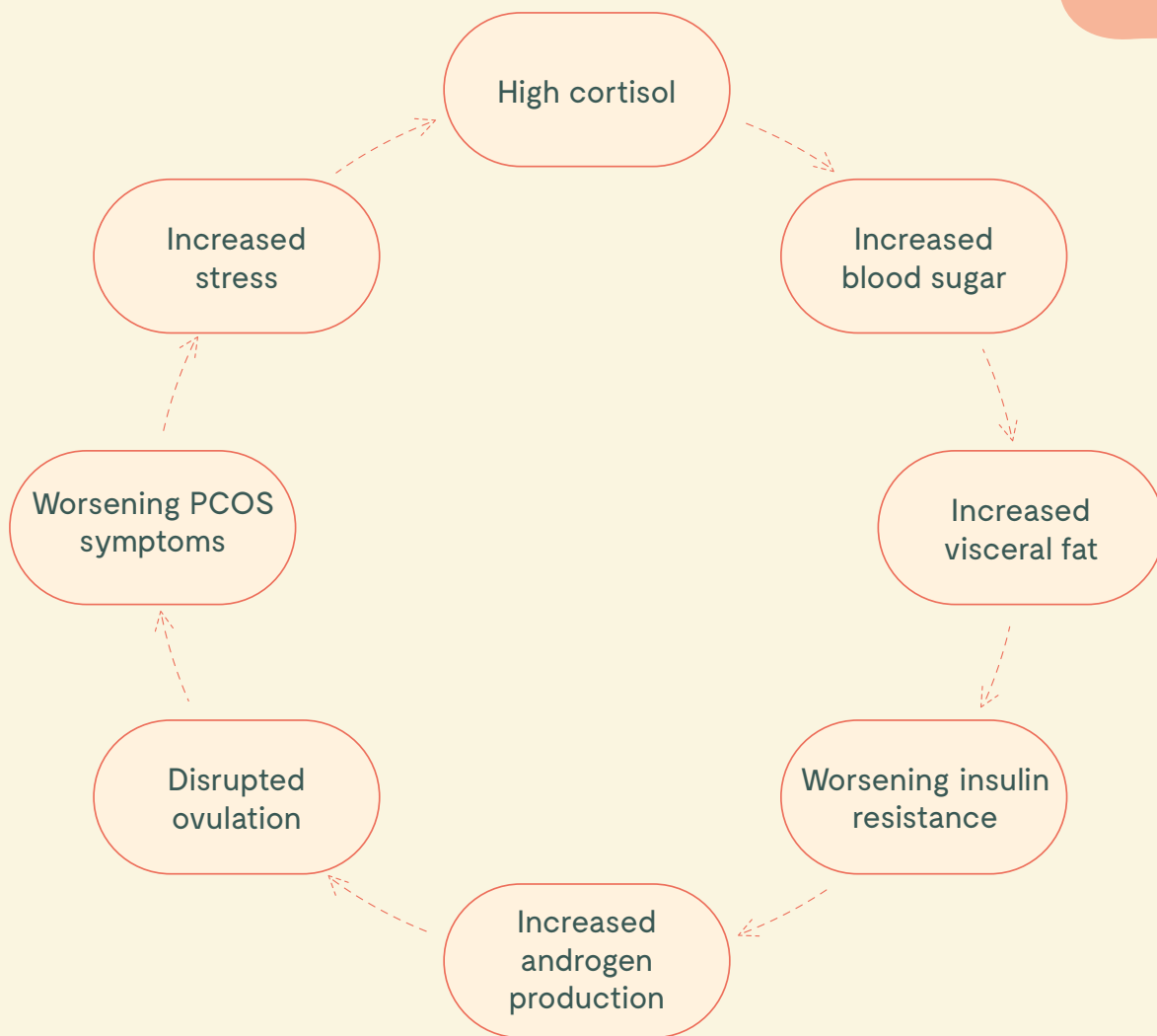
This stress response is helpful in the short term (it keeps us alert and helps mobilize us to confront a perceived threat), but when it happens too often or lingers too long, it creates a disharmony that can worsen insulin resistance and make PCOS symptoms more severe. Plus, when insulin resistance has already begun, the nervous system conductor can significantly amplify the problem through stress responses.

Produced by your adrenal glands (small organs that sit atop your kidneys), cortisol plays a crucial role in your body's stress response, but it also:

- Raises blood sugar by encouraging your liver to release stored glucose
- Increases insulin resistance in your cells
- Can disrupt sleep patterns, which further impacts hormone balance
- Influences appetite, often increasing cravings for high-calorie foods
- Can suppress reproductive hormone production when levels stay elevated



For many women with PCOS, stress and overwhelm (which can happen more often when dealing with PCOS symptoms) creates a challenging cycle which we call a “**feedback loop**”:



### Common symptoms of high cortisol include:

- Chronic fatigue
- Weight gain, especially in your face and belly
- Tension in the body
- Elevated blood pressure
- Brain fog
- Low sexual desire
- Mood changes including anxiety, irritability, and depression
- Digestive problems like constipation or bloating
- Mid-afternoon energy crashes
- Difficulty sleeping despite feeling tired – “wired but tired” feelings
- Intense cravings for carbohydrates and sugar

Understanding this connection is crucial because it means that taking care of your emotional well-being isn't just about feeling better mentally – it's an essential part of managing PCOS physically too.

## The Role of Trauma

Here's something that doesn't get talked about enough: the profound connection between trauma and PCOS. Indeed, your feelings and past experiences aren't just in your head – they create real, lasting physical responses in the body.

Trauma is what happens when overwhelming experiences get stuck in our body's nervous system because they were too much, too fast, or too soon for us to process, leaving unresolved patterns that continue to affect us long after the events themselves.

When you experience chronic stress or trauma, especially during your childhood, your nervous system can become stuck in states of hypervigilance or freeze – protective responses that were necessary then but may persist in the body long after the danger has passed. In other words, with unresolved trauma or chronic stress, your body constantly feels unsafe, and your survival mode stays activated for far too long.

This persistent nervous system dysregulation directly impacts your hormonal balance. When your body perceives a threat, it prioritizes survival over reproductive function – raising cortisol, disrupting insulin sensitivity, and altering reproductive hormones. For many women with PCOS, these physiological responses to past or present stress can maintain hormone imbalances even when everything else is “right.”

Think of it this way: your symptoms aren't random malfunctions – they're adaptive responses to perceived threat. **Your body isn't broken; it's responding exactly as designed to protect you.** This creates a challenging cycle where physical symptoms increase emotional distress, which reinforces nervous system dysregulation, which then worsens symptoms.

Breaking this cycle often involves addressing not just the physical symptoms but also the underlying nervous system patterns. Simple practices that help your body recognize safety, alongside approaches that process unresolved trauma, can create profound shifts where purely physical interventions have plateaued.

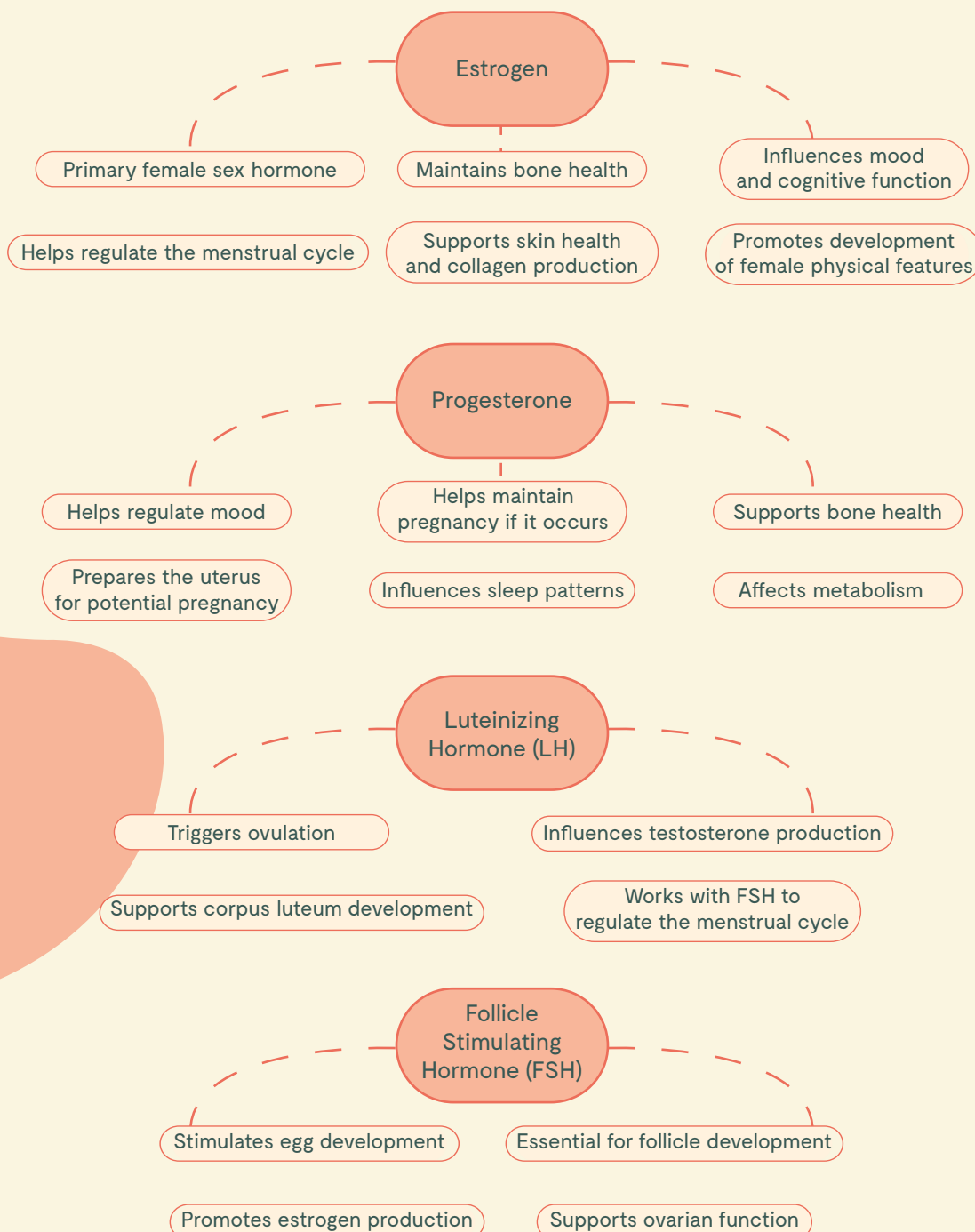
This perspective doesn't diminish the physical reality of PCOS but adds another dimension to healing – one that honors your whole experience and opens new pathways to balance. Without a doubt, when we begin to heal emotionally, the physical body tends to follow.

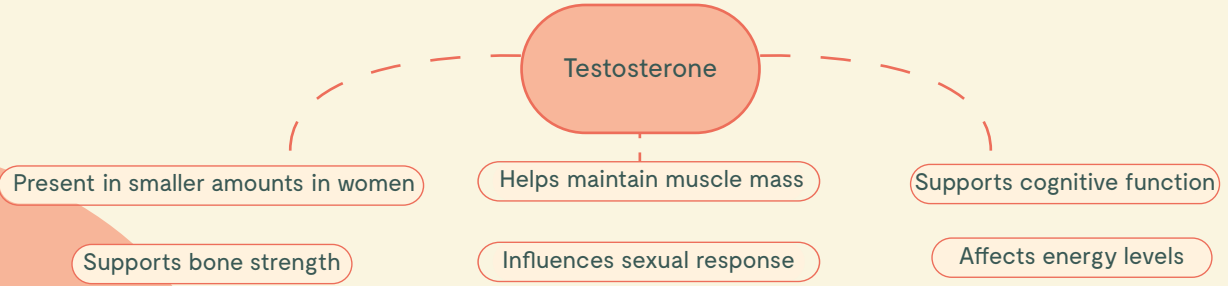
# How This All Affects Your Menstrual Cycle

Now that we understand how these various systems and factors interact in PCOS, let's connect everything back to what you might be experiencing most directly – changes in your menstrual cycle.

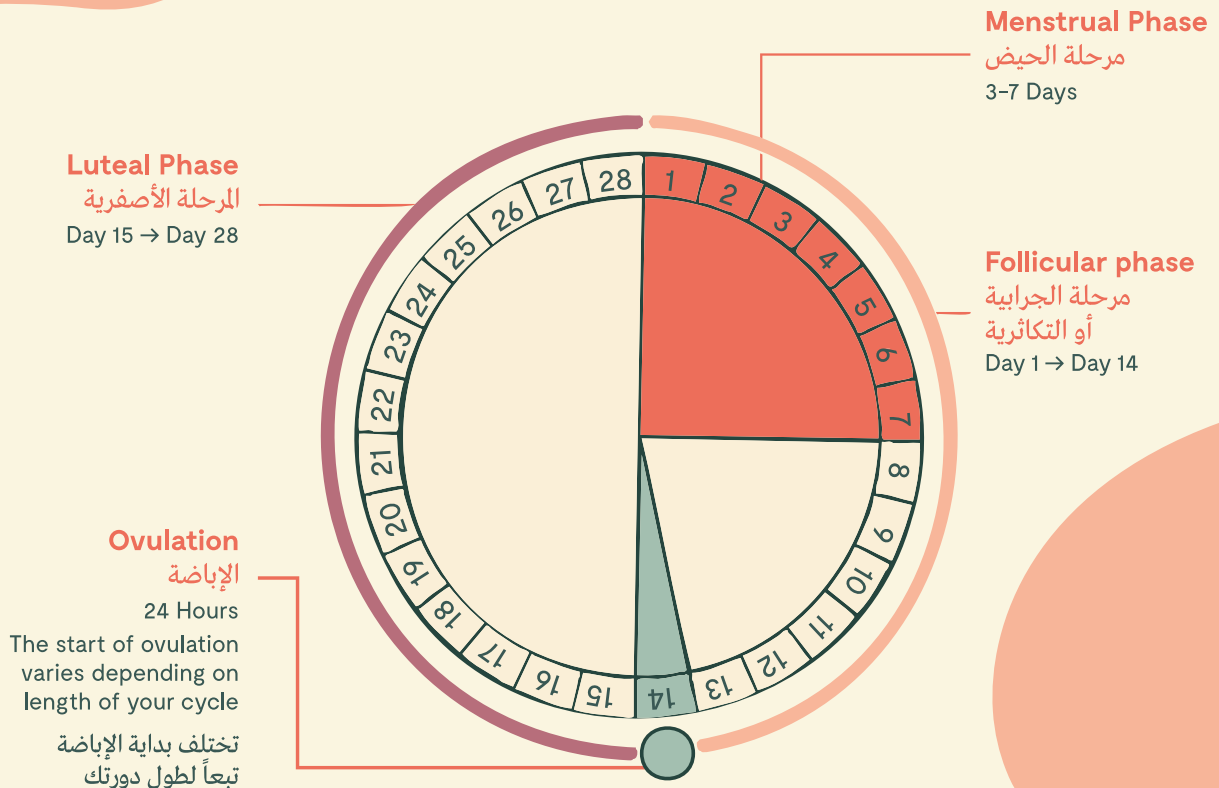
Your menstrual cycle is more than just periods and pregnancy. It's your body's fifth vital sign, as important as your blood pressure or temperature in indicating your overall health. Your cycle's patterns, regularity and symptoms say a lot about your entire wellbeing.

Your menstrual cycle is coordinated by five main hormones: **estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, FSH, and LH**. However, their roles go beyond just that. Here's what each one of them does in your body:



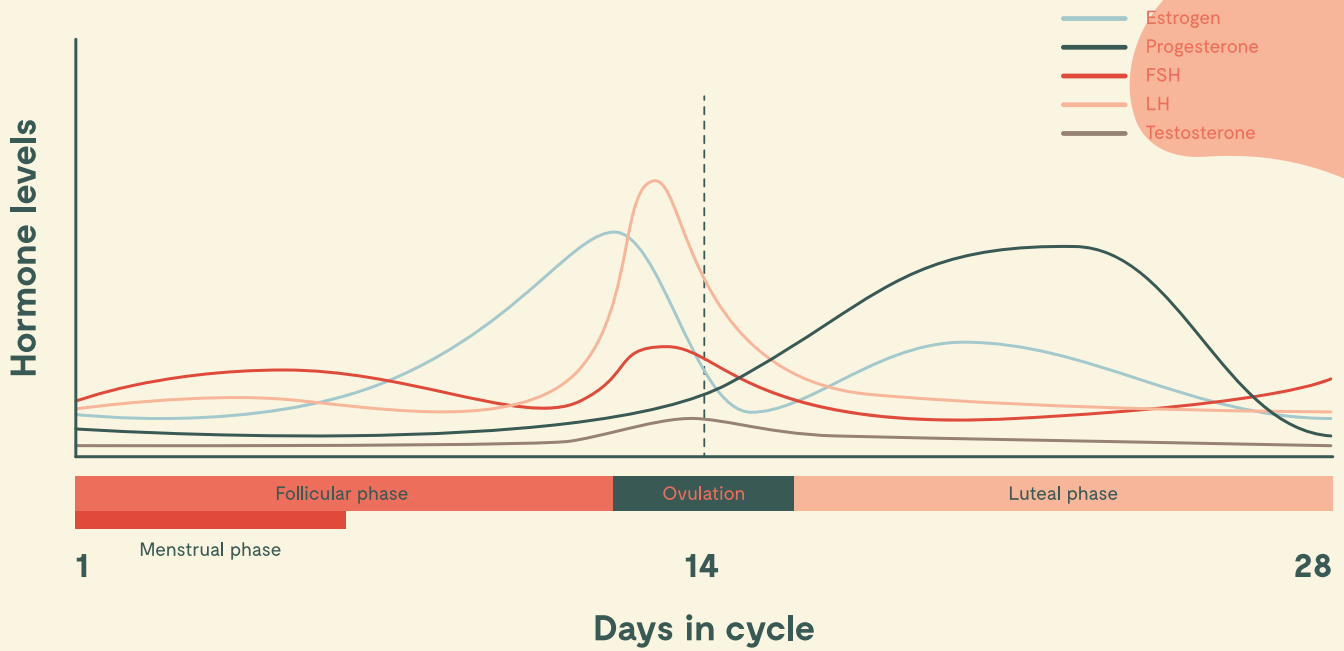


When these hormones – or instruments, to use the orchestra example – are playing out of tune, you might notice a change in the different phases of your cycle. But to be able to track that, it's important to first understand what those phases are.



This diagram outlines the different phases of the cycle based on averages. Remember that every woman and each cycle is different

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The average length of a menstrual cycle is 28 days. However, a cycle can range in length from 21 days to about 35 days and still be normal. The rise and fall of your hormones trigger the steps in your menstrual cycle. The 4 phases of your menstrual cycles are:

### The Menstrual Phase or Period

- This phase begins on the first day of your period.
- Your body is preparing to start a new cycle.
- Uterine lining sheds if pregnancy has not occurred.
- Estrogen and progesterone levels are at their lowest.
- Your body naturally needs to slow down, rest and recharge.
- Potential symptoms: cramping, back pain, fatigue, and mood changes.

### The Follicular Phase

- This phase begins on day you get your period and ends at ovulation.
- Your pituitary gland releases
- Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH).
- FSH signals your ovaries to prepare follicles to grow.
- Estrogen levels begin to rise.
- Estrogen rise will cause your lining to thicken again.
- During day 10-14, one developing follicle will become a fully mature egg.
- Potential symptoms: increased energy and improved mood as estrogen rises.

### The Ovulation Phase

- Sudden increase in Luteinizing Hormone (LH).
- This increase will cause one mature egg to be released into your fallopian tubes.
- Estrogen peaks and then drops.
- Your body temperature slightly increases.
- Potential symptoms: increased energy, improved mood, more sexual desire, and changes in your cervical mucus.

### The Luteal Phase

- This is the second half of your cycle and lasts from day 15 to 28
- Progesterone levels rise to help prepare lining for pregnancy
- If pregnancy doesn't occur, hormone levels drop
- The cycle prepares to begin again
- Potential symptoms: fatigue, irritability, bigger appetite, and lower energy.

**In a regular menstrual cycle, your hormones follow a carefully orchestrated pattern:**

1. Follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) rises to help an egg mature
2. Estrogen builds up to prepare your uterine lining
3. Luteinizing hormone (LH) surges to trigger ovulation
4. Progesterone increases after ovulation to maintain the uterine lining
5. If pregnancy doesn't occur, hormone levels drop and your period begins



In PCOS, the disruptions we've discussed interfere with this delicate dance, resulting in an impacted menstrual cycle.

### Impact of Insulin

High insulin levels stimulate your ovaries to produce more androgens, particularly testosterone. These elevated androgens disrupt the development of your follicles (the structures that contain your eggs), often preventing them from fully maturing and releasing an egg. Without ovulation, progesterone doesn't increase as it should, leaving estrogen unopposed.

### Impact of Stress

When you're chronically stressed and cortisol is elevated, your body doesn't think it's safe to reproduce. From a survival perspective, this makes perfect sense – why would your body prioritize reproduction during perceived danger? Your brain essentially puts survival first and suppresses the hormones needed for ovulation, leading to irregular or absent periods.

### Impact of Inflammation

Chronic inflammation can interfere with how your ovaries respond to hormone signals and may contribute to the development of ovarian cysts. It can also affect the quality of developing eggs and interfere with the hormonal communication required for regular cycles.

All the hormonal orchestra members we've discussed – insulin, testosterone, cortisol, inflammatory markers – are playing too loudly or at the wrong times, drowning out the regular rhythm of estrogen and progesterone that conducts your cycle.

Understanding this connection helps explain why approaches that address insulin resistance, stress, and inflammation often lead to more regular menstrual cycles – they're helping restore the proper hormonal harmony your cycle depends on.

# Breaking the Cycle: Understanding Points of Intervention

Understanding these three conducting systems and how they influence each other helps us see where we might make positive changes. Effective PCOS management addresses all three conductors:

- Regulating the nervous system through somatic healing work and stress management techniques
- Supporting the endocrine conductor through blood sugar balance and nutrition
- Soothing the immune conductor through anti-inflammatory practices

Think of it as helping all three conductors find harmony again, allowing the entire orchestra to play in balance once more.

## What You Can Do Today: Start With Awareness

Understanding is the first step to healing. Today, we want you to start becoming more aware of how these different aspects of PCOS show up in your life. Take a few minutes to sit quietly and reflect.

1. Think about what you've eaten today and how it made you feel. Did some meals give you more energy than others?
2. Notice how your body feels right now. Are you tense? Relaxed? Energetic? Tired?
3. Consider your stress levels and how they might be affecting your symptoms. Identifying potential triggers

You don't need to change anything yet – just observe. This awareness will help you start recognizing patterns that we'll work on adjusting in later sections.

## Remember

PCOS is complex, but understanding how all these pieces fit together gives us multiple opportunities to make positive changes. In the next sections, we'll explore practical strategies for managing each aspect of PCOS, building on everything we've learned here.



# 3 Treating PCOS

What Your Doctor Didn't Tell You



Now that we understand what PCOS is and how it develops, let's talk about something that might be weighing heavily on your mind: what can you actually do about it?

Perhaps you've been told that staying on birth control indefinitely is your only choice, or maybe you're worried that you'll never feel truly healthy again. Whether you've just been diagnosed or have been struggling with PCOS for years, understanding all your options is crucial for taking control of your health journey.

## Can PCOS be Cured?

Here's something hopeful that your doctor might not have told you: while **PCOS can't be cured in the traditional sense, i.e. just by taking a pill, it is something you can manage effectively**, to the point where symptoms become minimal, or even reversed. Yes, you read that correctly – reversed.

### What does reversal look like in practice? You might see:

- Regular menstrual cycles
- Improved fertility
- Better blood sugar control
- Reduced hair growth
- Clearer skin
- Easier weight management
- Improved energy levels
- Better mood stability and stress management

**This improvement requires commitment to a long-term strategy that addresses the root causes of your PCOS, not just the symptoms.** Now this does take time, patience, and consistent care, but the results can be transformative.

### Different women see improvements at different rates, depending on factors like:

- Severity of symptoms
- How long they've had PCOS
- Overall health status
- Consistency with treatment
- Individual body response

Even after your symptoms improve, some level of maintenance will be necessary. But don't let this discourage you. Many women find that the healthy habits they develop become second nature, and the overall mental and physical benefits extend far beyond just managing PCOS.

# Why Typical PCOS Treatments Often Fall Short

The hormone pyramid we previously went over explains why approaches that only target top-level hormones (like birth control pills) often provide temporary symptom relief without creating lasting change. The supplements, restrictive diets, and intense workout programs won't create meaningful shifts unless the imbalance at the foundation is addressed first.

**Your body has innate wisdom.** Rather than trying to outsmart it or force it into balance, the most effective approach is working with your body's natural hierarchy to restore harmony from the ground up. This isn't about failure or lack of effort; **it's about understanding your body's needs and working with it rather than against it.**

## The Truth About Hormonal Birth Control

When most women receive a PCOS diagnosis, they leave their doctor's office with a birth control prescription and some generic lifestyle advice, like eat well, exercise more, and stress less.

Hormonal birth control is often presented as the primary solution for PCOS, and while it can definitely be a useful tool in certain situations, it's important to understand exactly what it does – and what it doesn't do. **What you need to understand about hormonal pills is that they don't heal your PCOS.**

Here's what's really happening: Birth control pills provide synthetic hormones that suppress your body's natural hormone production and ovulation. The "period" you get on birth control isn't a true period – it's actually "withdrawal bleeding" that occurs when you take the inactive pills. While this creates the illusion of a regular cycle, it's artificially induced and doesn't address the underlying hormone imbalances causing your PCOS symptoms. **When you stop the birth control, the original imbalance behind your PCOS is still there, often unchanged.**

This doesn't mean birth control has no place in PCOS treatment. Indeed, many doctors default to prescribing birth control because it provides quick symptom relief. It can be helpful for:

- Protecting your uterine lining from excessive buildup (reduces the risk of endometrial hyperplasia)
- Managing heavy or painful bleeding
- Providing contraception if needed
- Offering temporary symptom management while you work on deeper healing

More PCOS-knowledgeable providers now recognize that while birth control may be useful in treatment plans, addressing root causes through metabolic, inflammatory, and lifestyle interventions leads to more meaningful long-term improvements. **If you're currently on birth control and considering stopping, it's important to have support and a plan in place first.** Your body will need time to remember how to produce and regulate its own hormones again. Working with a doctor who understands this transition can help you manage any temporary symptom flare-ups while your body readjusts.

## Other Medical Treatments

Beyond birth control, there are other conventional medications that can play a valuable role in managing PCOS. These include:

### Medication for insulin resistance

It works by helping your cells respond better to insulin, which can improve both metabolic health and hormone balance.

### Anti-androgen medications

These medications can provide relief from symptoms like excess hair growth or acne while you're working on addressing the root causes of your hormone imbalance.

### GLP-1 receptor agonist medications

These prescription medications (like Ozempic and Mounjaro) work by slowing digestion, reducing appetite, and improving insulin sensitivity, all potentially beneficial for PCOS management.

The key is understanding that these medications can be helpful tools – think of them like crutches that help you walk while a broken leg heals. They can provide valuable support, especially during the early stages of treatment or when symptoms are more severe. Many women find that combining these medications with lifestyle changes leads to better results than either approach alone.

As always, taking any medication will present both benefits and side effects. Make sure you're well informed on both and are working with a doctor to ensure you find the plan that's right for you. There's no one-size-fits-all approach – it's about finding what works best for your body.

# Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Having the right medical support is crucial for your PCOS journey. Unfortunately, many women don't receive comprehensive care simply because they don't know what to ask for. Let's change that.

When meeting with your healthcare provider, you deserve someone who listens and understands that PCOS is complex. Think of these conversations as building a partnership for your health. Here are important discussions to have.

## Understanding Your Unique PCOS Pattern

First, request comprehensive physical examination, including:

- Blood pressure
- BMI
- Waist circumference to determine body fat distribution (value greater than 35 inches= abnormal)
- Signs of hyperandrogenism and insulin resistance

Requesting comprehensive hormone testing can help you understand your specific imbalances. This includes:

- Full hormone panel
- DHEA-S
- Free and Total Testosterone
- TSH
- Prolactin
- 17 hydroxyprogesterone
- Fasting Insulin
- 2-hour oral glucose tolerance test
- Inflammatory Markers
- Vitamin D, B12, and Iron levels
- Cortisol patterns
- Sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG)

Even if your blood sugar appears normal, testing for insulin resistance is crucial as it often precedes blood sugar changes. Many women with normal blood sugar already have insulin resistance that's affecting their hormones.

## Family Planning and Fertility:

Whether you're thinking about having children now or in the future, understanding how PCOS affects your fertility is important. Here are questions to ask:

- How might current treatments affect my fertility?
- What preparations might be needed for future pregnancy?
- What are my options for optimizing reproductive health?
- How might treatment plans need to be adjusted for family planning?
- How can I track my ovulation and cycle health?
- What specific supplements or medications might be needed for conception?

## Managing Multiple Health Concerns:

PCOS often comes with other health considerations. Here are questions to ask:

- How does PCOS interact with my other health conditions?
- Are there any medication interactions I should be aware of?
- What symptoms might indicate other underlying conditions?
- How often should we monitor my thyroid, blood sugar, and other markers?
- What preventive care do I need given my PCOS?

## Tracking Progress:

Understanding how to measure improvement is crucial. Here are questions to ask:

- Which lab values should we monitor and how often?
- What physical symptoms indicate improvement?
- How can I track my cycle regularity effectively?
- When do we adjust treatment approaches?
- What signs suggest we need to modify the treatment plan?



# Beyond Medication: Your Holistic Options

Now, let's explore something exciting – the many natural approaches that can help manage PCOS. While we'll dive deeper into each of these in later sections, we want to give you a bird's eye view of what's possible beyond staying on medications indefinitely.

## Using nutrition as medicine:

This isn't about strict dieting or deprivation – it's about understanding how different foods affect your body and choosing ones that support healing.

## Supporting your microbiome:

Your gut health not only directly impacts your hormone balance, but your overall mood as well.

## Opting for movement that heals:

The key is finding types of activity that strengthen rather than stress your body.

## Supporting your nervous system:

Practices that help regulate the nervous system and create a felt sense of safety in the body can transform your body's state from chronic defense to restoration and balance.

## Creating a hormone-friendly environment:

While supplements aren't a cure-all, certain ones can support your healing journey.

## Supplementing strategically:

The key is finding types of activity that strengthen rather than stress your body.

## Improving your sleep:

Quality sleep isn't just about feeling rested – it's essential for hormone balance.

Think of these approaches as different instruments in your healing orchestra. Each plays its own important role, and when combined thoughtfully, they create a harmony that supports your body's own natural healing abilities.

# What You Can Do Today: Your First Steps

If this information starts to feel overwhelming, take a deep breath and remember that you don't need to implement everything at once. Healing from PCOS is a journey, not a race, and every small step forward counts.

**Let's start with something manageable today.** First, take a moment to reflect on your symptoms and what matters most to you. What aspect of PCOS affects your quality of life the most? This will help you decide where to focus first.

Choose just one of these simple steps to start with one small lifestyle change:

- Add a protein-rich breakfast within an hour of waking
- Take a 10-minute walk after meals
- Create a simple bedtime routine
- Switch one personal care product to a clean alternative
- Start a basic breathing practice before bed, such as the 4-7-8 breath.

## Remember

Progress isn't always linear. You might have good days and more challenging days. That's normal and okay. What matters is the overall trend toward improvement, not perfection.

You're not alone in this journey, and you don't have to figure it all out at once. Your body has an amazing capacity for healing when given the right support, and there are many paths to better health beyond staying on medications indefinitely.

In the following sections, we'll dive deeper into each of these approaches, providing you with specific, practical strategies you can implement at your own pace. For now, choose just one small step forward. That's enough to begin your journey toward better health.

The background features a pattern of thin, wavy, horizontal orange lines. Overlaid on this are several abstract shapes: a large, light-orange, teardrop-shaped area on the left and center, and a smaller, dark-teal, teardrop-shaped area on the right.

# 4 Lifestyle Changes

Starting with the Foundations

We've explored what PCOS is, why it develops, and the various treatment options available to you. Now, let's dive into something that can dramatically impact your symptoms but is often overlooked: your lifestyle. While diet and exercise are important (and we'll cover those in upcoming sections), there are other powerful lifestyle factors that can either support or hinder your hormone balance.

In this section, we'll explore how stress, sleep, your environment, mental health, and your nervous system all play crucial roles in managing PCOS. These elements are deeply interconnected, forming a web that can either support your healing or challenge it. The good news is that small, consistent changes in these areas can create significant improvements in your symptoms over time.

## Managing Stress

We've established the importance of addressing hormones in a hierarchical way, starting with the ones that form the base of the pyramid, including cortisol (the stress hormone).

It's particularly important to understand that your body's stress response happens regardless of whether the stress is physical, emotional, or environmental. It doesn't distinguish between being chased by a predator, arguing with a loved one, exposing yourself to toxins, or skipping meals – it responds with the same cascade of hormonal changes.

Breaking the stress-PCOS cycle requires addressing both the PCOS itself and how you respond to stress.

### Mindfulness

Mindfulness, which simply means paying attention to the present moment through your 5 senses without judgment, has been shown to reduce cortisol levels and improve insulin sensitivity – both crucial for PCOS management.

You don't need to meditate for hours or master complex techniques. Even five to ten minutes daily can make a difference. Here are a few easy ways to begin:

- **Follow your breath:** Take five slow, deep inhales and exhales, noticing how the air feels as it moves in and out.
- **Body scan:** Gently bring your attention to different parts of your body, simply observing any sensations—without trying to fix or change anything.
- **Use a guided app:** Try a beginner-friendly meditation app like Headspace, Calm, or Insight Timer to walk you through a short, calming session.
- **Be present in everyday moments:** Practice mindful awareness while showering, brushing your teeth, or eating—just by slowing down and noticing the sights, sounds, smells, and textures around you.

Mindfulness isn't about being perfect—it's about creating small pockets of calm that help your body shift out of "fight or flight" and into a state where healing is possible.

### Intentional Movement for Stress Reduction

While we'll cover exercise in detail in a later section, it's worth noting here that gentle, intentional movement can be particularly effective for stress management. The key is choosing movement that feels nourishing rather than depleting.

- Yin yoga or gentle stretching
- Walking in nature
- Tai chi or qigong
- Dancing to music you love like nobody's watching or eating

### Creating Boundaries and Space

Many women find themselves constantly caring for others while neglecting their own needs. Creating healthy boundaries, allowing yourself to receive, and learning how to say "no" can significantly reduce your stress load.

- Practice saying no to non-essential commitments.
- Schedule regular time for rest and activities you enjoy.
- Communicate your needs clearly with loved ones.
- Delegate tasks when possible.
- Learn how to receive instead of overgiving and emotional burn-out.
- Reduce exposure to people or situations that consistently drain your energy.

This isn't something you can learn to do overnight and you might find that you benefit from the support of a therapist to cultivate these skills and reinforce boundary setting.

### Technology Boundaries

While technology connects us in many positive ways, it can also be a significant source of stress.

- Set specific times to check email and social media.
- Create tech-free zones or times in your home.
- Turn off non-essential notifications.
- Consider a digital sunset an hour before bedtime.
- Be mindful of content that increases stress or comparison.

# Improving Your Sleep

Sleep isn't just rest – it's an active time of hormone regulation and nervous system restoration. Research shows that sleep disruption directly impacts insulin sensitivity and cortisol rhythms, the very foundation of your hormone hierarchy.

Plus, did you know that due to our body's cyclical nature & hormonal fluctuations, **women actually need more than the widely understood 8-hours of sleep?** Instead, try to aim for at least 9 hours of slumber (especially around your period).

## Creating Optimal Sleep Conditions

Your sleep environment and routine have a profound impact on your hormone balance. Let's explore how to optimize them and practice good sleep hygiene for a healthy circadian rhythm:

### 1. Transform your bedroom into a sleep sanctuary:

- Keep your room cool (around 18–20°C).
- Ensure proper darkness (consider blackout curtains).
- Minimize noise (earplugs or white noise can help).
- Remove electronics or cover indicator lights.
- Use comfortable, breathable bedding.
- Consider air quality (plants or air purifiers can help).

### 2. Focus on rhythm and consistency:

- Aim to sleep and wake at similar times, even on weekends.
- Align with natural daylight when possible (earlier to bed, earlier to rise).
- Expose yourself to morning sunlight within an hour of waking.
- Reduce blue-light exposure in the evening (use night mode on devices or wear blue-blocking glasses).
- Allow at least 9 hours for sleep every night.

### 3. Optimize your bedtime routine:

- Begin dimming lights 1-2 hours before bed.
- Engage in calming activities (reading, gentle stretching, warm bath).
- Avoid stimulating conversations or content.
- Consider relaxation techniques like progressive muscle relaxation.
- Try sleep-supporting herbs like chamomile tea.

## Addressing Common Sleep Disruptors

Several factors commonly disrupt sleep for women with PCOS. Here's how to address them:

**1. Blood sugar fluctuations:** Nighttime blood-sugar drops can trigger adrenaline release, waking you up.

- Consider a small protein-fat snack before bed if you tend to wake around 2-3 a.m.
- Ensure balanced meals throughout the day.
- Limit sugary foods and alcohol in the evening.

**2. Magnesium deficiency:** Many women with PCOS are deficient in magnesium, which is crucial for relaxation.

- Consider magnesium-rich foods (dark leafy greens, nuts, seeds).
- Some find topical magnesium or baths with magnesium salts helpful.
- Discuss supplementation with your healthcare provider.

**3. Racing Mind:** If your thoughts keep you awake, this one's for you.

- Keep a journal by your bed to write down thoughts or worries.
- Practice the "brain dump" technique before bed.
- Try the cognitive shuffling technique to help you drift off to sleep. Cognitive shuffling involves thinking of random, unrelated words or images—in no particular order. This mimics the brain's natural pre-sleep state (similar to dreaming), making it easier to drift off.
- Use guided relaxation audios specifically designed for sleep.
- Try the progressive muscle relaxation technique: by tensing and then relaxing muscles in a specific order.
- Consider the 4-7-8 breathing technique (inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8).

## Creating a Hormone-Friendly Environment

Your external environment affects your internal environment way more than you might think. **Our modern world is full of xenoestrogens and endocrine disruptors;** these are chemicals which can interfere with your body's hormonal system by mimicking, blocking, or altering natural hormone functions. They are found in many plastics, pesticides, and personal care products. Consider:

- Switching to clean personal care products (makeup, fragrances, skincare...) free of endocrine disruptors
- Using glass or stainless steel instead of plastic for food storage
- Filtering your drinking and shower water
- Choosing organic produce when possible to minimize pesticide exposure

These changes don't need to happen all at once – even small adjustments can make a difference over time.

# Prioritizing Your Emotional Wellbeing

Living with PCOS can take an emotional toll. The physical symptoms, fertility concerns, and ongoing management can impact your mental wellbeing.

Research shows that women with PCOS are 77% more likely to experience anxiety and twice as likely to struggle with depression compared to those without the condition.

And it's not a one-way street—your emotional state doesn't just respond to hormone imbalances; it actively influences them. Chronic stress, anxiety, and depression can disrupt cortisol, insulin, and reproductive hormones, creating a cycle that makes PCOS symptoms harder to manage.



**There are biological reasons why PCOS affects mood.** The hormonal fluctuations impact neurotransmitters, insulin resistance affects brain function, inflammation can influence mood regulation, and sleep disruptions impact emotional resilience. All of this creates a physical basis for mood challenges beyond just coping with a chronic condition.

Many women with PCOS find themselves caught in patterns of perfectionism, people-pleasing, overgiving, and boundary struggles that maintain their body in a chronic stress state, directly worsening hormonal imbalances. Breaking these cycles requires recognizing when you're operating from a place of "never enough" and learning that **rest is a necessity, not a reward to be earned.**

## Practical steps to support your emotional wellbeing with PCOS:

- **Consider therapy to work on these patterns.** With professional support, you can start to build emotional resilience and self-compassion you need to take on this journey.
- **Establish clear boundaries** in personal and professional relationships.
- **Practice saying "no"** without lengthy explanations or guilt.
- **Schedule regular rest periods** in your calendar with the same priority as work commitments.
- **Explore somatic (body-based) therapies** that address how stress is held physically.
- **Use journaling** to identify patterns of overextending yourself.
- **Develop a "minimum self-care plan"** for challenging times.

Addressing these emotional patterns isn't about blaming yourself for PCOS but recognizing that complete healing includes both physical and emotional aspects of health.

# Regulating Your Nervous System

What was once considered a complementary approach is now understood to be central to PCOS healing. Your nervous system isn't just another factor in PCOS – it's the master regulator that influences every aspect of your hormone health. This understanding represents a paradigm shift in PCOS treatment, moving from symptom management to addressing the root neurological patterns that maintain hormonal imbalance.

Your autonomic nervous system has two main modes of functioning:

- The sympathetic nervous system (“fight or flight”)
- The parasympathetic nervous system (“rest and digest”)

Women with PCOS often spend too much time in sympathetic dominance, which promotes:

- Higher cortisol and adrenaline
- Increased insulin resistance
- Digestive challenges
- Sleep disruptions
- Anxiety and tension

Learning to shift into parasympathetic dominance (a restful nervous system state) more frequently can significantly improve hormone balance and insulin sensitivity, creating an environment where healing becomes possible from the cellular level up

**To sum it up: you can't outsmart, think your way out, exercise your way out, supplement your way out or diet your way out of a dysregulated system.** This is gentle, bottom-up work that needs to start with the root of the problem, within the body.

# Healing in Stages: The Progressive Journey

Healing PCOS through nervous system regulation typically unfolds in stages rather than all at once. Many women find they progress through several phases:

## Awareness

Recognizing how stress affects your body and PCOS symptoms

## Connection

Reestablishing the mind-body connection that chronic stress can disrupt

## Regulation

Developing the capacity to shift your nervous system state intentionally

## Integration

Making regulation practices part of your daily life

## Resilience

Building the ability to maintain balance even during challenges

Each stage builds on the previous one, creating a foundation for deeper healing. This progressive approach acknowledges that your body has its own timeline for healing that's worth honoring, and working with a trauma informed somatic therapist is key here.

# Somatic Practices for Nervous System Regulation

While nervous system regulation does require the guidance of a professional somatic therapist, there are some somatic practices you can do to help you self-soothe, regulate your nervous system and connect you with your body's sensations. Try any of these as a starting point.

## Conscious Breathing Practices:

- Extend your exhales longer than your inhales to signal safety.
- Practice diaphragmatic (belly) breathing regularly.
- Try box breathing (inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4).
- Use the 4-7-8 technique (inhale from your belly for 4 seconds through the nose, hold for 7, exhale for 8 through the mouth).
- Notice how your breath changes with different emotions.

## Grounding Practices:

- Feel your feet on the floor, noticing all points of contact.
- Walking barefoot on the beach, grass, nature
- Place one hand on your heart and one on your belly.
- Engage your senses by naming 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.
- Hold a cold object or splash cold water on your face.
- Squeeze a stress ball or hug yourself firmly.

## Vagus Nerve Stimulation:

- Hum, sing, or chant.
- Gargle vigorously.
- Try cold exposure on your face.
- Perform low, gentle neck rotations.
- Prioritize laughter and social connection.
- Co-regulate with a loved one or someone you trust: being with someone you feel safe with—talking, hugging, holding hands, or even just sitting together—can help soothe your body and mind.

## Emotional Release:

- Allow yourself to cry when needed.
- Use movement to release tension (shaking, dancing).
- Practice vocal release (sighing, humming).
- Journal about difficult emotions.

**Note:** These practices are great to incorporate into your daily routine and can provide temporary aid when you're feeling activated or dysregulated. However, actual trauma healing work and shifting to a sustainable felt sense of safety in the body require the guidance of an expert. Plus, when our nervous system is dysregulated or we've experienced past trauma, we may have a much harder time tuning into sensations and staying in our body. This is why it's essential to be gentle with yourself, go slow and titrate trauma healing with the help of a somatic therapist.

## What You Can Do Today: Simple Steps for Hormone Balance Throughout your Day

Healing PCOS at the root level is a journey, not a destination. Each small step creates momentum for deeper healing. Remember that you're not just managing symptoms – you're creating the conditions for your body to restore balance from the foundation up.

As we wrap up this section on lifestyle changes, let's focus on practical steps you can take today. Remember, you don't need to implement everything at once. Choose one or two practices that resonate with you and build from there.

### Morning Practice (5-10 minutes)

Start your day with practices that set a foundation for hormone balance:

- Upon waking, take 5 deep breaths before checking your phone.
- Expose yourself to natural light within an hour of waking.
- Practice a brief body scan to notice how you're feeling.
- Set an intention for how you want to care for yourself today.
- Hydrate with warm water and a pinch of mineral-rich salt.

### Daytime Regulation (2-minute practices)

Integrate brief practices throughout your day:

- Set a timer to take a few conscious breaths every hour.
- Practice feet-on-the-floor grounding between tasks.
- Take a 2-minute break outdoors when possible.
- Use meal times as opportunities to shift into a parasympathetic state.
- Notice moments of joy or pleasure and savor them.

### Evening Wind-Down (15-30 minutes)

Create a consistent routine to signal to your body that it's time to rest:

- Dim lights and reduce screen exposure 1-2 hours before bed.
- Engage in a calming activity you enjoy.
- Practice gentle stretching or relaxation poses.
- Reflect on three things you appreciate about your day.
- Prepare your sleep environment for optimal rest.
- If you're feeling anxious before bed, try progressive muscle relaxation or this shaking exercise.

Our bodies store tension and pent-up energy, especially when feeling “tired but wired.” This simple shaking exercise helps discharge tension and reduce anxiety by releasing what your body has been holding.

1. Find a private, comfortable space and stand naturally.
2. Take a moment to notice tension in your body without judgment.
3. Drop your shoulders and feel your feet anchoring you to the ground.
4. Shake your entire body—arms, legs, back, hips—for 30 seconds.
5. Breathe deeply throughout; make sounds (sighs, “aaahh”) if comfortable.
6. After shaking, stand still and notice the difference in how you feel.
7. Finish by lifting your heels and stomping your feet several times to ground yourself.

This practice helps release muscular tension and regulate your nervous system. Use it whenever you feel stressed, anxious, or physically tense.

## Remember


Consistency matters more than perfection. Small changes, consistently applied, lead to significant improvements over time. These practices aren't just “nice-to-have” additions to your PCOS management – they're fundamental approaches that address the root causes underlying your symptoms.





# 5 Nutrition for Hormone Balance

Using Food as Medicine



In this section, we'll explore how to use nutrition as a form of self-care rather than restriction. Our goal is to help you develop a peaceful relationship with food while supporting your hormonal health.

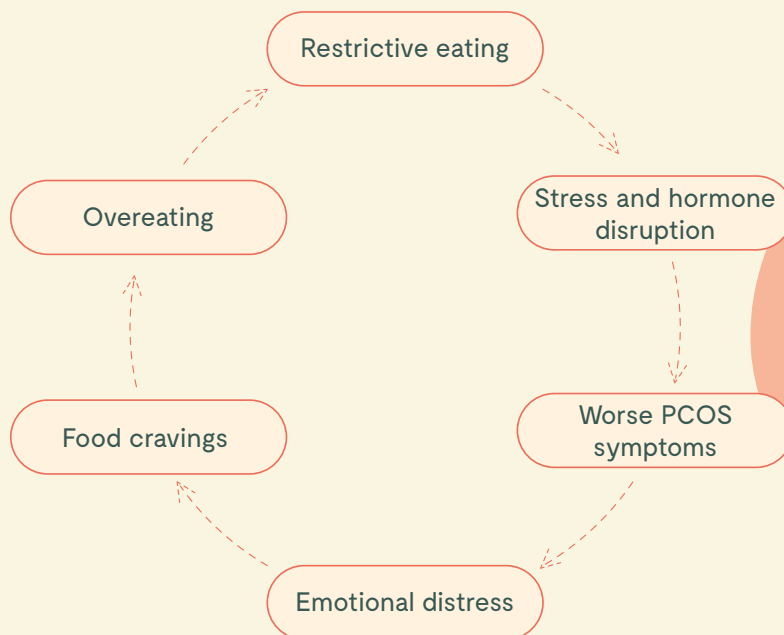
## Nurturing Your Relationship with Food

Before we dive into specific nutrition strategies, let's acknowledge something important: many women with PCOS develop complicated relationships with food. Research shows a significant overlap between PCOS and eating disorders, particularly binge eating disorder, with studies suggesting women with PCOS may be three to five times more likely to experience disordered eating patterns.

This connection exists for several understandable reasons:

- Intense, biological drives for certain foods caused by insulin
- Hormonal imbalances that affect appetite regulation and mood
- Inability to manage weight despite “doing everything right”
- Well-intentioned but potentially harmful dietary advice from healthcare providers
- Body image challenges from visible PCOS symptoms

For many women, PCOS and disordered eating become a difficult cycle:



If you recognize these patterns in yourself, please know that healing is possible. Working with professionals who understand both PCOS and eating disorders can help you develop a balanced approach to nutrition that supports your physical health without compromising your mental wellbeing. The goal isn't perfect eating—it's nourishing your body consistently while healing your relationship with food.

The nutrition guidance we'll share is meant to support your hormonal health, not to create rigid rules or trigger unhealthy patterns. If you notice feelings of anxiety, guilt, or obsession around food choices, please prioritize your mental wellbeing and consider working with professionals who understand both PCOS and eating disorder recovery.

## Remember

Consistency matters more than perfection, and nourishment is more important than restriction. It's nourishing your body consistently while healing your relationship with food.

## Anti-Inflammatory Foods

Chronic inflammation plays a significant role in PCOS, creating a cycle that worsens insulin resistance and hormone imbalance. Your food choices can either fuel or fight this inflammation.

### Anti-inflammatory Foods To emphasize

- Colorful fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants (berries, leafy greens, peppers)
- Omega-3 rich foods (fatty fish, walnuts, flaxseeds)
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Turmeric, ginger, and other Anti-inflammatory spices
- Green tea

### Inflammatory triggers to Minimize

- Highly processed foods with Artificial ingredients
- Foods with added sugars
- Refined carbohydrates
- Fried food
- Processed seed oils (corn, soybean, sunflower)
- Excessive alcohol



Rather than focusing on calorie restriction or weight loss, which can backfire by increasing stress hormones and slowing metabolism, we'll focus on blood sugar balance as the foundation of hormone-supportive nutrition.

## 1. Eat Real, Whole Foods

Focus on foods that come from nature rather than packages. Whole foods contain fiber, nutrients, and natural compounds that support hormone balance and help your body process carbohydrates more effectively. They also tend to be more filling and satisfying.



### Include more:

- Colorful vegetables (especially leafy greens)
- Quality proteins (eggs, fish, poultry, grass-fed meats, legumes)
- Healthy fats (olive oil, avocados, nuts, seeds)
- Fiber-rich foods (vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, seeds)
- Anti-inflammatory herbs and spices (turmeric, ginger, cinnamon)



### Minimize:

- Processed foods with added sugars
- Refined carbohydrates (white bread, pasta, snack foods)
- Industrially processed seed oils (found in most packaged foods)
- Artificial sweeteners and food additives

## 2. Understand Carbohydrate Quality and Types

Your body needs carbohydrates, particularly for energy and hormone regulation. However, when it comes to carbohydrates and PCOS, quality matters as much as quantity.

Rather than eliminating carbohydrates entirely (which isn't healthy and can sometimes increase stress hormones), focus on consuming complex carbohydrates and pairing them with protein, fat, and fiber to lower their glycemic impact. Different types of carbohydrates affect your blood sugar and insulin levels in vastly different ways.

### Simple carbohydrates

(sugars, refined grains, processed foods)

They digest quickly, causing rapid blood sugar spikes that can worsen insulin resistance and trigger androgen release.

### Complex carbohydrates

(vegetables, legumes, whole intact grains)

They contain fiber that slows digestion, creating a more gradual glucose release and steadier insulin response.

# 3. Balance Your Plate and Eating Order

How to structure your meals for up to 30% less glycemic impact and blood sugar spikes and crashes:



1. Start with Fibers  
(Vegetables, especially non-starchy ones.)



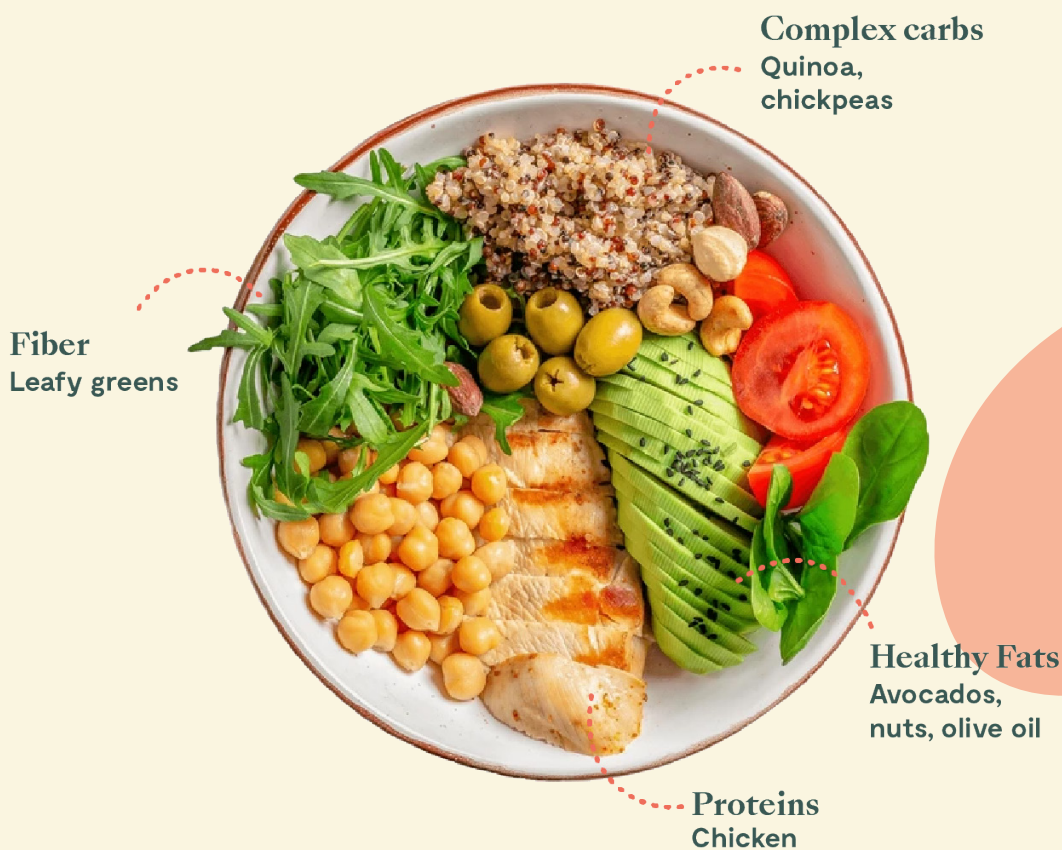
2. Add Proteins & Healthy fats



3. Eat your complex Carbohydrates last.

The total quantity of macros (protein, fat and carbohydrates) you should consume per meal and per day will vary depending on your bodyweight, exercise regimen and personal goals. This is something that a nutritionist can help you determine.

How to balance your plate:



## 4. Include Protein at Every Meal and Snack

Protein helps slow glucose absorption, keeps you fuller longer, and provides the building blocks your body needs for hormone production and tissue repair.

Aim to include a significant amount of quality, nutrient dense protein at each meal, and your snacks too. **For example, for breakfast, it's recommended to always start your day with 30g of protein.** This emphasis on protein intake will help combat insulin resistance.

### SHOPPING LIST

- Eggs
- Fish and seafood
- Poultry
- Grass-fed meats
- Plain Greek yogurt
- Cottage cheese
- Tofu and tempeh
- Legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas)
- Quality protein powders  
(as supplements, not replacements)

## 5. Embrace Healthy Fats

Despite years of low-fat diet advice, research now shows that healthy fats are essential for hormone production, nutrient absorption, and blood sugar stability. Fats slow down digestion, helping you feel satisfied longer and preventing rapid blood sugar changes.

### SHOPPING LIST

- Extra virgin olive oil
- Avocados and avocado oil
- Coconut and coconut oil
- Nuts and seeds (walnuts, almonds, chia, flax)
- Fatty fish (salmon, sardines, mackerel)
- Grass-fed butter or ghee  
(if dairy is tolerated)



## 6. Consider Dairy and Gluten Sensitivity

For some women with PCOS—though not all—dairy and gluten can influence symptom severity and create more inflammation.

### Dairy considerations

Conventional dairy products contain natural hormones and growth factors that may affect insulin and androgen levels in sensitive individuals. Some women with PCOS who eliminated dairy have experienced improvements in acne, hirsutism, and cycle regularity.

If you enjoy dairy and tolerate it well, focus on:

- Full-fat, grass-fed options when possible
- Fermented forms like yogurt and kefir
- Moderation rather than elimination, unless you notice clear symptom triggers

### Gluten considerations

While there's no definitive evidence that gluten affects all women with PCOS, those with autoimmune tendencies or gluten sensitivity may experience reduced inflammation when removing it.

Rather than immediately eliminating these food groups, consider:

1. A structured 30-day elimination with proper reintroduction to assess your individual response
2. Working with a healthcare provider to test for true sensitivities
3. Focusing on quality—choosing organic, less processed options if you include these foods

## 7. Consider Meal Timing and Frequency

When you eat can be almost as important as what you eat. Consider:

- Eating most of your food during daylight hours when metabolism is naturally higher
- Allowing 3-4 hours between meals for proper digestion
- Including protein at breakfast to set your blood sugar pattern for the day
- If appropriate for you, exploring gentle time-restricted eating (like a 12-hour overnight fast from dinner to breakfast)
- Avoiding coffee first thing in the morning on an empty stomach, as this causes a cortisol spike. Have breakfast first and wait 90 mins after waking up before consuming caffeine.

## 8. Bonus tips

Several natural approaches can help improve how your body processes meals and balance out your hormones:

- Consider a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar in water about 15-20 minutes before meals to improve insulin sensitivity.
- Include digestive spices like ginger, cinnamon, and turmeric in your meals.
- Stay hydrated with filtered water throughout the day. Aim for at least three litres of water a day.
- Move gently for 10-15 minutes after meals to help your body process glucose, like taking a walk after you're done eating.
- Include probiotic-rich fermented foods like sauerkraut, pickles, miso, kimchi, or yogurt to support gut health.
- Spearmint tea is highly effective when it comes to managing high testosterone levels. Aim for two cups a day.

# Supplementing for PCOS

While food should be your primary source of nutrition, certain supplements can support your body's hormone balance.

**Inositol:** Available as myo-inositol or a combination of myo-inositol and D-chiro-inositol, this supplement helps improve insulin sensitivity and may support ovulation.



**Magnesium:** Magnesium, more specifically magnesium glycinate, helps regulate blood sugar, reduce muscle tension, and improve sleep quality.



**Omega-3 fatty acids:** help reduce inflammation and support hormone production. Sources include fish oil, algae oil, or flaxseed oil.



**Vitamin D:** Many women with PCOS have lower vitamin D levels, which can affect hormone balance and mood. Testing your levels can help determine if supplementation is needed.



**Zinc:** plays a role in ovulation, insulin sensitivity, skin health and helps with high testosterone – all important for women with PCOS. Just try to consume it with food to avoid an upset stomach.



**N-Acetyl Cysteine (NAC):** may help reduce inflammation and improve insulin sensitivity.



## Remember

supplements should complement, not replace, a nutrient-dense diet. Always discuss supplements with your healthcare provider, as individual needs vary.

# Sample Meal Plan

Here's what a day of PCOS-friendly eating might look like. Remember, this is just an example – your individual needs may vary, and food should be enjoyed, not just followed by prescription.

## Morning

- Glass of water with a squeeze of lemon to hydrate
- Veggie egg scramble with 2 to 3 eggs, sautéed spinach, bell peppers, and avocado, served with a small portion of berries
- Spearmint tea

## Mid-Morning (if hungry)

- Small handful of mixed nuts

## Lunch

- Large salad with leafy greens, colorful vegetables, 115-170 grams protein (of chicken, fish, or lentils), olive oil and vinegar dressing
- Small portion of quinoa or sweet potato (optional)

## Afternoon

- Apple slices with 1 to 2 tablespoons almond butter
- Spearmint tea

## Dinner

- 115-170 grams of baked salmon with herbs
- Green beans, eggplant, bell peppers (roasted) or artichokes with olive oil
- Small portion of roasted sweet potato (optional)

## Evening (if hungry)

- Greek yogurt with cinnamon and a few berries
- Calming herbal tea like chamomile

# What You Can Do Today: Ask ChatGPT!

It would be great if you could work with a nutritionist to help develop a full PCOS-friendly meal plan that aligns with your needs, goals and preferences. If not, you could use ChatGPT to customize your own meal plan. In your prompt, make sure to include:

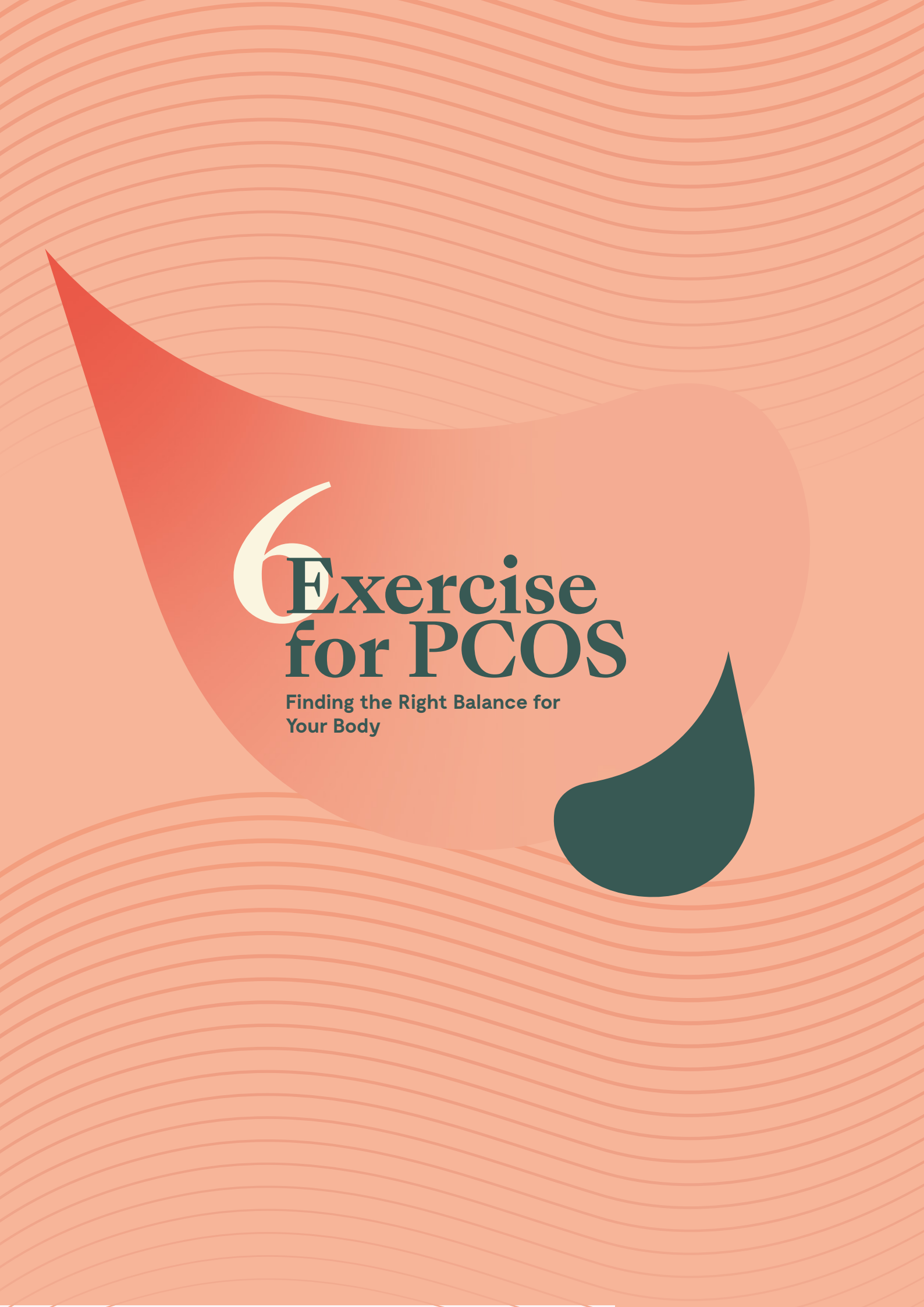
- The fact that you have PCOS
- Your underlying condition that you want to work on (insulin resistance, inflammation, thyroid, adrenal fatigue...)
- Your dietary preferences (omnivore, vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian, gluten free, lactose intolerant...)
- Your goals (weight loss, weight gain, building muscle, maintenance...)
- How often you want to eat
- How often you work out
- The kinds of food you love
- The kinds of food you don't enjoy
- Your budget and time willing to spend preparing meals

**Example:** *Hi! I have PCOS and I'm trying to create a meal plan to help me manage this condition and reverse its symptoms. I also have insulin resistance. I'm an omnivore and I eat 3 meals a day with snacking in-between. I love fruits and pasta, but I don't like tomatoes, chicken and shrimp. Please avoid complicated meals that take time to prepare, and ingredients that are difficult to come by in Egypt like chia seeds or flax seeds, or that are too expensive. I workout twice a week. Please develop a protein-rich, high-fiber meal plan with recipes for the next month that I can follow to help balance out my hormones and improve my insulin resistance.*

Ask anything



Starting new eating patterns can feel overwhelming, so begin with just one or two changes that feel manageable. Remember, nutrition for PCOS isn't about perfection or restriction – it's about nourishing your body consistently with foods that support hormone balance. Small, sustainable changes over time create the foundation for lasting health.



# Exercise for PCOS

Finding the Right Balance for  
Your Body

Exercise plays a crucial role in PCOS management, but the type, intensity, and timing of movement matter significantly. In this section, we'll explore how to approach exercise in a way that supports your hormones rather than stressing them further.

## How Exercise Impacts Your Body and Hormones

Movement affects nearly every system in your body, including your hormonal balance. For women with PCOS, the right exercise approach can create profound positive changes by:

- Improving insulin sensitivity
- Reducing inflammation
- Balancing stress hormones
- Supporting mood and mental wellbeing
- Promoting better sleep

However, it's important to understand that **not all exercise affects your hormones in the same way**. High-intensity or excessive exercise can sometimes increase stress on your body and potentially worsen hormonal imbalances if your system is already taxed.

## The Importance of Muscle

One of the most powerful ways exercise helps manage PCOS is by building and maintaining muscle tissue. **Your muscle mass is like a metabolic engine that:**

### Improves insulin sensitivity

Muscle tissue acts like a sponge for blood sugar, helping to clear it from your bloodstream. More muscle mass means more storage capacity for glucose, which reduces insulin needs and helps balance blood sugar.

### Increases metabolic rate

Muscle tissue requires more energy to maintain than fat tissue, so having more muscle supports a healthier metabolism even when you're at rest. For women with PCOS who often struggle with metabolic slowdown, this is particularly beneficial.

### Provides resilience as you age

Maintaining muscle mass helps protect against age-related metabolic decline, providing long-term benefits for PCOS management throughout your life.

### Supports hormone production and clearance

Muscle tissue plays a role in hormone metabolism, helping your body process and eliminate excess hormones more efficiently.

# Choosing the Right Exercise



While movement is beneficial, certain exercise approaches may not be optimal for women with PCOS, especially during initial healing stages:

## Excessive high-intensity training

High-intensity interval training (HIIT), spinning, or boot camp classes can increase cortisol and create additional stress on an already taxed system.

## Marathon cardio sessions

Very long endurance sessions (45+ minutes of steady-state cardio) can sometimes trigger stress responses and inflammation.

## Inconsistent, sporadic exercise

Random intense workouts with long breaks in between don't allow your body to adapt properly and can create more stress than benefit.

## Exercise without proper recovery

No adequate time to adapt and repair can increase inflammation and stress hormones.

This doesn't mean you need to avoid these forms of exercise entirely. Many women with well-managed PCOS can incorporate higher intensity workouts successfully, especially once their hormones are more balanced. The key is understanding your current state and adjusting accordingly.

# Beneficial Exercise Approaches for PCOS



Research and clinical experience suggest that these movement approaches tend to be particularly beneficial for women with PCOS:

## Strength training

Resistance exercises using bodyweight, bands, or weights help build the muscle tissue that improves insulin sensitivity. Aim for 2-3 sessions per week, focusing on compound movements (exercises that work multiple muscle groups). Even 20- to 30-minute sessions can be highly effective.

## Walking

Regular walking, especially after meals, helps manage blood sugar levels and provides stress-reducing benefits without overtaxing your system. Studies show that even a 15-minute walk after meals can significantly reduce post-meal blood sugar spikes.

## Yoga and Pilates

These modalities build functional strength while emphasizing mind-body connection and often incorporate breathwork that supports nervous system regulation. Research shows that women with PCOS who practice yoga regularly experience improvements in insulin resistance and anxiety levels.

## Zone 2 cardio

This is lower-intensity cardiovascular exercise where you can still hold a conversation – like brisk walking, easy cycling, or swimming. This intensity is particularly effective for building mitochondria (your cells' energy factories) and improving insulin sensitivity without increasing stress hormones.

## Enjoyable movement

Activities you genuinely enjoy reduce stress hormones and are more sustainable long-term. Dancing, hiking, recreational sports, or gardening all count as beneficial movement for PCOS.

The most effective approach often combines several types of movement throughout the week.

# Creating Your Movement Plan: Finding Balance

Rather than prescribing a one-size-fits-all exercise program, we encourage you to create a personalized approach based on your current hormonal state, energy levels, and lifestyle. Here's a framework to consider.

If you're just beginning your PCOS healing journey or experiencing significant fatigue:

- Start with daily walking, preferably outdoors in morning light.
- Add one or two gentle strength training sessions per week (20-30 minutes).
- Incorporate restorative yoga or gentle stretching, especially before bed.
- Focus on consistency rather than intensity.
- Gradually increase as your energy improves.

If you have moderate symptoms and stable energy:

- Include two strength training sessions per week (30-45 minutes).
- Add daily walking, especially after meals.
- Incorporate one or two yoga or Pilates sessions weekly.
- Consider one or two sessions of zone 2 cardio (30-45 minutes).
- Include adequate rest days and recovery practices.

## Remember

your needs may vary throughout your menstrual cycle as well. Many women find they have more energy for intense exercise during the follicular phase (first half of cycle) and benefit from gentler movement during the luteal phase (second half).

# Sample Weekly Movement Plan

Here's an example of a balanced weekly movement plan for someone with moderate PCOS symptoms:

MON	TUE	WED	THU
60-minute full-body strength training with focus on major muscle groups	30-minute yoga flow or 45-minute walk	Rest day or gentle walking	60-minute strength training with focus on different muscle groups than Monday
	FRI	SAT	SUN
	30-minute Pilates or yoga	Longer, enjoyable activity like hiking, dancing, or swimming	Rest day or gentle walking

Additionally, aim for:

- Short 10-15 minute walks after meals when possible
- Movement breaks throughout the day if you have a sedentary job
- Stress-reducing activities like gentle stretching before bed

# Exercise and Your Menstrual Cycle

Working with your cycle rather than against it can enhance the benefits of exercise for PCOS. **Your hormonal fluctuations throughout the month affect your energy levels, recovery capacity, and even how your body responds to different types of movement.** However, many women with PCOS have irregular cycles, which can make cycle-based exercise planning challenging. If this is your experience, you can:

1. **Track your body's signals** instead of calendar days. Notice patterns in your energy, hunger, temperature, and mood to identify where you might be in your cycle.
2. **Follow a modified approach** based on how you feel each day, prioritizing what your body is asking for rather than following a strict schedule.
3. **Use a simplified two-phase approach** - alternating between periods of slightly more challenging exercise when you feel energetic, and more restorative movement when you feel the need for support.
4. **Opt for gentler exercise during your period.** Your hormone levels are at their lowest, and you may experience lower energy. This is your body's natural time for rest and renewal, so it's important to honor where your body is at. Prioritize rest and very gentle movement like slow, mindful walking, gentle yoga focusing on hip openers and restorative poses, light stretching or mobility work.

## Remember

Working with your cycle, even an irregular one, is about honoring your body's wisdom rather than forcing it to conform to an external schedule.

# What You Can Do Today: First Steps

Starting a new movement routine can feel overwhelming, so begin with something simple and sustainable:

1. **Take a 10-minute walk after dinner tonight.** This supports digestion, helps regulate blood sugar, and gives you a moment to connect with your body
2. **Set a movement intention for tomorrow.** Decide on one form of movement you'll do, when you'll do it, and for how long. Be specific and realistic.
3. **Assess your current movement patterns.** Reflect on your existing relationship with exercise and identify one small improvement you could make this week.
4. **Find movement that feels enjoyable.** Make a list of physical activities you genuinely like or have enjoyed in the past, and consider how to incorporate them.

## Remember

The goal isn't perfect adherence to an intense regimen. Consistent, enjoyable movement that supports your hormones will create far more benefit than sporadic intense workouts followed by exhaustion and abandonment.

The background features a pattern of thin, wavy, horizontal orange lines. Overlaid on this are several abstract shapes: a large, light-orange teardrop shape on the left, a smaller, darker-orange teardrop shape on the right, and a large, light-orange circle in the center. The text is centered within the circle.

# 7 Tracking & Monitoring

Measuring Your Progress with PCOS

Let's discuss something that can powerfully enhance your journey: tracking and monitoring your progress. By observing patterns, noticing changes, and celebrating improvements, you gain valuable insights that can help you fine-tune your approach and stay motivated over time.

However, tracking comes with an important caveat: **it should support your healing, not create additional stress.** If you find yourself becoming obsessive about tracking or feeling anxious about your data, it may be time to step back and reassess your approach. Remember that healing isn't linear, and natural fluctuations are part of the process.

## What to Track

There are countless aspects of health you could potentially track, but trying to monitor everything can quickly become overwhelming. Instead, consider focusing on a few key areas that are most relevant to your PCOS symptoms and goals. Here are some valuable metrics to consider:

### Cycle Patterns

Even if your cycles are irregular (which is common with PCOS), tracking them provides valuable information about your hormonal health.

#### Menstrual cycle length and patterns

The number of days between periods and how this changes over time. As your hormonal health improves, you might notice more regular cycles.

#### Period characteristics

Flow heaviness, duration, color, and any clotting or pain. These details can offer insights about your hormone balance and endometrial health.

#### Ovulation signs

Changes in cervical fluid, basal body temperature, or ovulation pain. Identifying ovulation is a positive sign that your hormones are moving toward balance.

#### Pre-menstrual symptoms

Tracking mood, energy, bloating, or breast tenderness before your period can help you identify patterns and prepare supportive strategies.

If you're not experiencing regular cycles, don't be discouraged. Instead, focus on tracking other bodily signs and symptoms, as even subtle shifts can indicate improvements in your hormonal health.

# Physical Symptoms

PCOS manifests differently for each woman, so tracking your specific symptoms can provide personalized insights.

## Skin changes

Document acne patterns, skin texture, or areas of concern. Take periodic photos in consistent lighting to notice gradual improvements.

## Hair growth patterns

Note changes in hair growth on the face, body, or scalp. These changes often occur slowly, so monthly documentation is usually sufficient.

## Energy levels

Rate your energy throughout the day on a simple scale (1-10). This can reveal improvements in metabolic health that might precede other visible changes.

## Sleep quality

Track how long it takes to fall asleep, any night wakings, and how rested you feel upon waking. Sleep improvements often correlate with hormonal balance.

## Digestive function

Note any bloating, constipation, or digestive discomfort, as gut health and hormonal health are closely connected.

## Physical measurements

If weight or body composition is a concern, consider monthly measurements rather than frequent weighing. Remember that improved health doesn't always correlate with weight changes.

## Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

PCOS affects more than just your physical body. Tracking your mental and emotional state can reveal important patterns.

### Mood fluctuations

Note changes in your emotional state, particularly in relation to your cycle or lifestyle factors.

### Stress levels

Rate your perceived stress daily or weekly to identify patterns and triggers.

### Mental clarity

Track brain fog, focus, and cognitive function, which often improve with better metabolic health.

### Anxiety or depression symptoms

Document the intensity and frequency of these feelings, which may change as hormones balance.

## Lifestyle Factors

Tracking your daily habits provides context for your symptoms and helps identify what's working.

### Nutrition patterns

Rather than tracking calories, consider noting food groups, meal timing, or how different foods make you feel.

### Movement

Document type, duration, and intensity of physical activity, along with how it affects your energy and mood.

### Sleep habits

Track bedtime, wake time, and total hours of sleep to establish connections with your symptoms.

### Stress management practices

Note which techniques you use and their effectiveness.

### Environmental exposures

Track changes in your environment, such as switching to cleaner personal care products or improving air quality in your home.

## Laboratory Values

If you're working with healthcare providers, tracking certain lab values over time can provide objective measures of progress.

Request copies of your lab results and keep them organized chronologically to observe trends over time. Remember that lab values should be interpreted within the context of how you're feeling, not just whether they fall within "normal" ranges.

## Effective Tracking Methods

The best tracking method is one that you'll actually use consistently. Consider these approaches, adapting them to fit your preferences:

- Using an app for cycle tracking
- Keeping a simple journal for symptoms and reflections
- Trying out devices like Oura Ring, Whoop, or Fitbit to track sleep, heart rate variability, temperature, and activity metrics that relate to hormonal health
- Taking periodic photos for visual changes
- Maintaining a file of lab results

No matter which method you choose, consistency is more important than comprehensiveness. It's better to track a few key metrics reliably than to attempt tracking everything and become overwhelmed.

# Interpreting Your Data

Collecting data is just the first step. The real power comes from interpreting what your tracking reveals.

## Looking for Patterns

Review your tracking regularly to identify connections:

- Do your energy levels correlate with certain foods or exercise types?
- How does stress affect your cycle or skin?
- Do you notice symptom improvements after implementing specific changes?

Give yourself at least three months before drawing major conclusions, as hormonal changes take time to manifest.

Your tracking might reveal areas where your current approach isn't serving you:

- If certain symptoms persist despite consistent efforts
- If you notice negative patterns emerging from specific interventions
- If your overall wellbeing isn't improving over time

Use these insights to refine your approach rather than seeing them as failures. Healing is a process of continual learning and adjustment.

# What You Can Do Today: Getting Started with Tracking

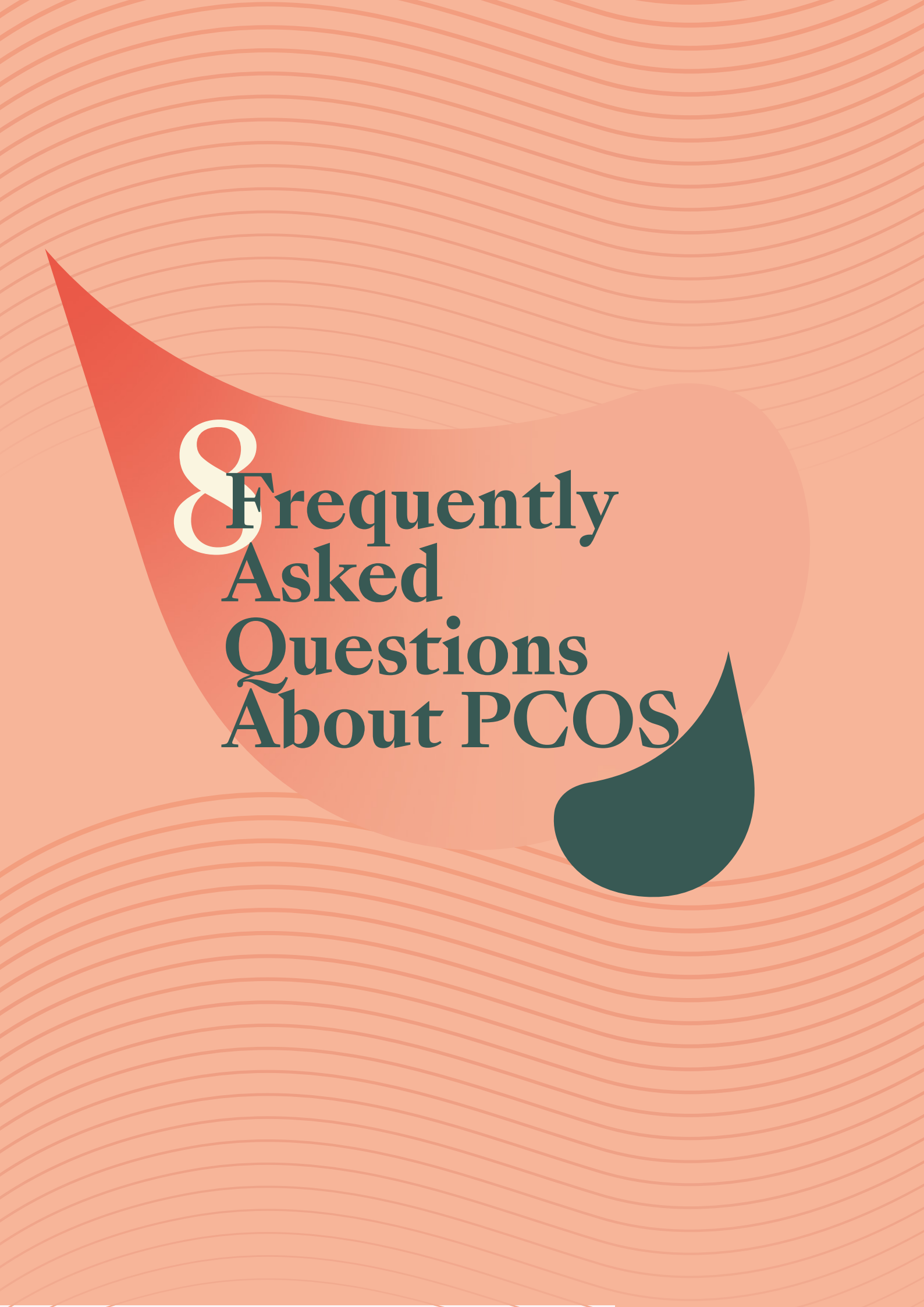
Begin your tracking journey with these simple steps:

1. **Choose your primary focus.** Select one to three aspects of PCOS that most affect your quality of life, and start tracking just those elements.
2. **Select a tracking method** that feels sustainable. Whether it's a specialized app, a simple notebook, or a combination of tools, choose something that fits naturally into your routine.
3. **Create a baseline record.** Document your current symptoms, cycle patterns, energy levels, and any other metrics you've chosen to track. This becomes your starting point for measuring progress.
4. **Set a regular review schedule.** Decide when you'll review your tracking—perhaps weekly for symptoms and monthly for bigger-picture patterns.
5. **Start a “victories” journal.** Alongside tracking symptoms, create a dedicated space to note improvements and wins, no matter how small they might seem.


## Remember

Tracking is a tool to support your healing journey, not a measure of your worth or success. Approach it with curiosity and compassion, allowing the insights it provides to guide your path forward. Healing is not a linear process, it will come with its own natural ebbs and flows and that's completely normal. It's also important to acknowledge the reality that certain aspects of your health—like genetics, hormonal fluctuations, or environmental factors—remain beyond your complete control, despite your best efforts.

**Take time to recognize and celebrate each small victory along the way**, whether it's a better night's sleep, a day with more stable energy, or a moment of peace with your body, without demanding flawless results or constant improvement. **Above all, view your tracking as information, not judgment.**



**8 Frequently  
Asked  
Questions  
About PCOS**



As we conclude our guide, let's address some common questions that many women have about PCOS.

## What causes the cysts on the ovaries in PCOS?

The "cysts" in PCOS aren't actually true cysts, but rather immature follicles that haven't completed their development. Normally, your ovaries develop several follicles each month, but one becomes dominant and releases an egg (ovulation). In PCOS, several specific hormonal imbalances disrupt this delicate process. As a result, follicles begin growing but stall midway through development, accumulating as small fluid-filled sacs often arranged like a "string of pearls" around the outer edge of the ovary. Importantly, not all women with PCOS have visible cysts, while others have cysts without having PCOS, which is why diagnosis requires considering multiple factors beyond just ovarian appearance.

## Can the cysts shrink or go away, and are they dangerous?

Yes, the immature follicles or "cysts" in PCOS can definitely shrink and disappear when hormonal balance improves. As insulin sensitivity increases and androgen levels decrease through lifestyle changes, medication, or supplements, many women experience a normalization of ovarian function. When ovulation occurs, these follicles can finally complete their development rather than remaining stalled. This is why women with previously polycystic ovaries often see significant improvements on ultrasound after successful treatment approaches.

As for safety, PCOS follicles are generally not dangerous – they don't typically rupture, twist (torsion), or become cancerous like other types of ovarian cysts might. They aren't directly painful themselves, though the hormonal imbalances associated with them can cause cyclical discomfort. The main concern with PCOS follicles isn't their physical presence but rather what they represent: anovulation (lack of ovulation), which can lead to irregular periods, fertility challenges, and if prolonged without treatment, potentially increased risk of endometrial issues due to lack of regular shedding of the uterine lining.

# How can I help prevent my daughter from developing PCOS?

While PCOS does have a genetic component, it's not inherited in a simple or straightforward way. It's important to remember that genetics are just one piece of the puzzle—the environment in which those genes express themselves matters tremendously. Here are some recommendations for creating supportive environmental conditions for your daughter:

## During pregnancy and infancy

Maintain balanced blood sugar during pregnancy, manage stress, consider breastfeeding, and minimize exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals.

## Childhood nutrition

Emphasize whole foods, include quality proteins and healthy fats, limit sugar and processed foods, encourage intuitive eating, and create positive food relationships.

## Movement and play

Promote joyful movement, limit sedentary time, support diverse physical activities, and focus on body appreciation based on function rather than appearance.

## Emotional health

Create safe spaces for emotional expression, model healthy stress responses, teach mindfulness practices, ensure adequate downtime, and maintain consistent sleep routines.

## Environmental considerations:

Choose natural personal care products, filter water, use glass containers, select organic foods when possible, and use natural cleaning products.

Early intervention makes a tremendous difference. Monitor for early warning signs like premature puberty, rapid weight gain, skin changes, unusual hair growth, or persistent fatigue, and remember that early intervention makes a tremendous difference if PCOS does develop. Plus, the most powerful gift you can give your daughter is your example – showing her how to care for her body with compassion, how to advocate for her health, and how to build resilience in the face of challenges. Whether she develops PCOS or not, these lessons will serve her throughout her life.

## Can I get pregnant with PCOS?

Yes, many women with PCOS successfully conceive and have healthy pregnancies. PCOS is one of the most treatable causes of infertility. Approaches that improve insulin sensitivity and reduce inflammation often help restore ovulation, which is the primary fertility challenge with PCOS. Depending on your specific situation, this might involve nutrition and lifestyle changes, supplements like inositol, or fertility medications if needed. Working with healthcare providers who understand both PCOS and fertility can significantly improve your chances of conception. Many women find that addressing the root causes of their PCOS not only helps with fertility but also supports healthier pregnancies with reduced risk of complications.

## Does PCOS go away after menopause?

PCOS doesn't completely disappear after menopause, but its presentation and management often change. After menopause, all women naturally produce fewer ovarian hormones, which can reduce some PCOS symptoms like irregular periods and acne. However, the underlying metabolic aspects of PCOS—insulin resistance, inflammation, and cardiovascular risks—typically remain and may even become more significant health concerns. This is why addressing the root causes of PCOS throughout your life is important for long-term health. Many women find that the lifestyle approaches that help manage PCOS symptoms during reproductive years continue to benefit their overall health after menopause.

## How is PCOS different from regular menstrual irregularities?

While occasional menstrual irregularities are common and can be caused by stress, significant lifestyle changes, or other temporary factors, PCOS involves a constellation of symptoms and underlying hormonal patterns. What distinguishes PCOS is the presence of high androgens (either in blood tests or through symptoms like excess hair growth), alongside either irregular/absent periods or polycystic ovaries on ultrasound. PCOS also typically involves metabolic changes like insulin resistance that aren't present in common menstrual irregularities. If you're experiencing persistent irregular periods (especially with other symptoms like acne, hair changes, or weight challenges), it's worth consulting with a healthcare provider for proper evaluation.

# Can PCOS cause weight gain, or does weight gain cause PCOS?

The relationship between PCOS and weight is bidirectional and complex. PCOS-related insulin resistance makes it easier to gain weight and harder to lose it, as insulin is a fat-storage hormone. At the same time, excess body fat (especially around the abdomen) can worsen insulin resistance and increase inflammation, exacerbating PCOS symptoms. This creates a challenging cycle that can feel frustrating. Importantly, while weight and PCOS are connected for many women, the relationship varies significantly between individuals—some women with PCOS maintain a normal weight despite metabolic challenges, while others struggle with weight regardless of their efforts. This is why personalized approaches that address your unique metabolic patterns are more effective than generic weight loss advice.

# Is there a connection between PCOS and other health conditions?

Yes, PCOS increases your risk for several health conditions, primarily due to its underlying metabolic and inflammatory components. These include insulin resistance (which can progress to type 2 diabetes), cardiovascular disease risk factors like high blood pressure and cholesterol imbalances, mood disorders including anxiety and depression, sleep apnea, fatty liver disease, and endometrial hyperplasia if periods are infrequent. The good news is that addressing the root causes of PCOS—improving insulin sensitivity, reducing inflammation, supporting hormonal balance—not only improves your immediate symptoms but also significantly reduces these long-term health risks. Regular monitoring with your healthcare team helps ensure any potential complications are caught early.

# How do I know if my PCOS treatment is working?

Improvement signs vary based on your symptoms, but positive indicators include: more regular menstrual cycles; reduced acne, hair growth or hair loss symptoms; stable energy levels throughout the day; improved sleep quality; better mood stability; reduced sugar cravings; and laboratory improvements in androgens, insulin levels, or inflammatory markers. Remember that healing often occurs in layers—some symptoms improve before others, and progress isn't always linear. Track your unique symptoms and patterns, celebrate subtle improvements, and maintain patience with the process. Most women notice some changes within three to six months of consistent lifestyle changes, though complete hormonal rebalancing may take longer. Trust both objective measurements and how you subjectively feel in your body.

## Is PCOS related to other hormonal conditions?

PCOS often occurs alongside other hormonal conditions, which can sometimes complicate diagnosis and treatment. Common connections include: thyroid disorders (particularly hypothyroidism, which can mimic or worsen PCOS symptoms); adrenal issues affecting cortisol patterns and stress response; and hyperprolactinemia (elevated prolactin). This is why comprehensive hormone testing is important for accurate diagnosis and treatment planning. If you're following appropriate PCOS protocols without seeing improvement, investigation of these other potential hormonal influences might be warranted. Many women find that addressing overlapping hormonal conditions creates more significant improvements than focusing on PCOS alone.

**If you have any questions or would like to get in touch, contact us here**



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