



*Sri Lanka College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists*

*“Advancing Women’s Health with Good Governance”*

# Are you aware of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome?

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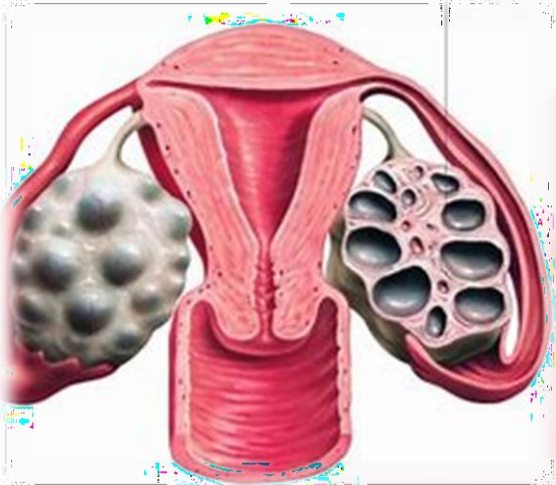
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"I am 24 years old. My periods are getting delayed. It occurs once every three to four months. I have gained 6 kg within the last three months. Also, my hair has started to fall and thin out. All these problems affect me very much."



The above is a description of the symptoms of a woman who visited her gynaecologist.

## Polycystic Ovary Syndrome



This fact sheet aims to inform you about a condition that affects females, known as PCOS. Therefore, if you or your loved ones suffer from this condition, this leaflet will help you gain awareness.

### What is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)?

It is a common health problem among young women in the society. The exact number of women who suffer from this condition is unknown, but it is estimated to be between 10 and 15 out of every hundred women.

In PCOS, the body's hormonal balance is changed, affecting the menstrual cycle. Other effects may include fatigue and changes in the body's external appearance. It can also have adverse effects on your long-term health.

### What are the symptoms of polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)?

This condition can occur from the beginning of a girl's menstrual cycle to menopause. More than half of women with this condition have no symptoms and can only have changes in the ovary.

The 3 main features:

1. Regular menstruation does not occur, and menstrual cycles are delayed. This is due to the failure of ovulation. For some women, the bleeding is scanty and for some it lasts for a long time.
2. An increase in the male hormone called testosterone produced by the body causes oily skin and acne. Excessive scalp hair loss and excessive hair growth can occur on the body.
3. A scan can detect ovarian enlargement and large accumulations of fluid-filled blisters.

### What other symptoms can be caused by PCOS?

- Excessive scalp hair loss



- Blackening on the back of the neck



- acne breakouts and oily skin



- Excessive body fat
- Rapid weight gain and difficulty in controlling weight
- Excessive hair growth on the face and other parts of the body



• The hormone insulin controls the level of glucose in the blood. But if you have PCOS, your body is not sensitive to the hormone insulin. As a result, the glucose level in the blood increases. To control these increased glucose levels, the body produces more and more of the hormone insulin. Increased insulin concentrations in the blood are associated with weight gain, irregular menstrual cycles, fertility problems, and increased testosterone levels.

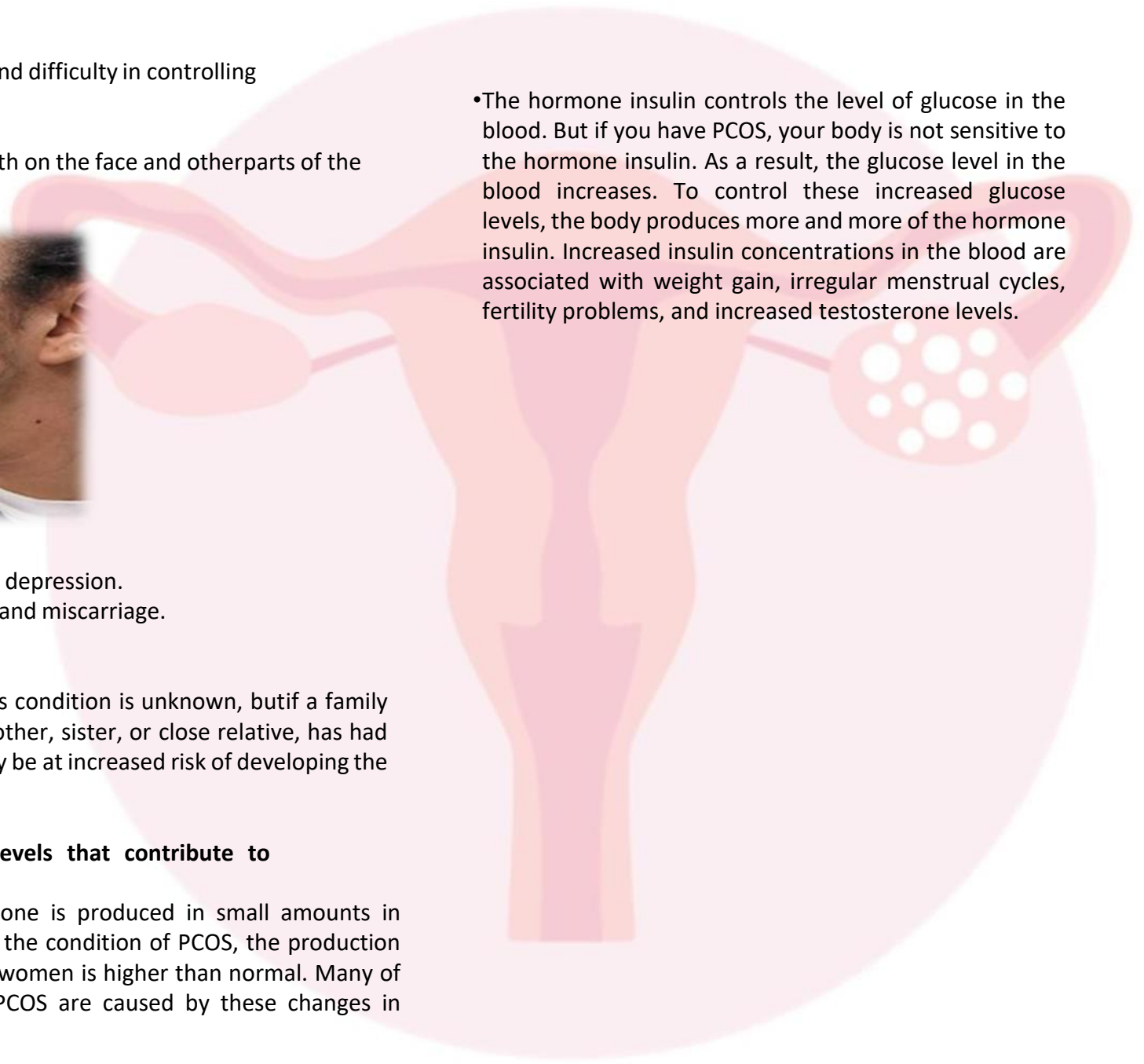
- Apathy, anxiety and depression.
- Delayed pregnancy and miscarriage.

### **What causes PCOS?**

The exact cause of this condition is unknown, but if a family member, such as a mother, sister, or close relative, has had this condition, you may be at increased risk of developing the condition.

### **Abnormal hormone levels that contribute to PCOS;**

- Testosterone hormone is produced in small amounts in women, and under the condition of PCOS, the production of this hormone in women is higher than normal. Many of the symptoms of PCOS are caused by these changes in hormone levels.





## **How is PCOS treated?**

The presence of polycystic ovaries does not necessarily mean PCOS. Some women with PCOS may experience periods of waxing and waning of symptoms (for example, weight gain and weight loss). In that case, diagnosis is quite difficult.

## **PCOS is diagnosed if any 2 of the following symptoms are present;**

1. Irregular, infrequent periods or no periods at all.
2. Increased facial and body hair growth and/or higher than optimal testosterone levels in blood tests.
3. Diagnosis of polycystic ovaries by ultrasound scan. Once diagnosed, a referral is made to a gynaecologist (a doctor who specializes in the female reproductive system).

## **How does PCOS affect long-term health?**

If you have PCOS, you are at increased risk for the long-term health problems described below.

### **Diabetes**

If the concentration of glucose in your blood is not at the optimal level, there is a risk of developing diabetes. One or two out of 10 women with PCOS tend to develop diabetes. If diabetes is not treated, it will have negative effects on other organs of the body.

The following conditions increase your risk of developing diabetes if you have PCOS;

- 40 years of age
- having relatives with diabetes
- Having diabetes during pregnancy
- Obesity/overweight.

If you are diagnosed with diabetes, you will be advised to follow a diet and be given tablets or insulin to control your blood sugar.

### **High blood pressure**

Women with PCOS are at increased risk of high blood pressure due to their body's resistance to the hormone insulin and excess body weight. Treating high blood pressure is essential as it can cause heart disease.

### **Cancer**

If menstruation occurs less than three times a year, it may lead to thickening of the endometrium of the uterus. This condition puts a small number of women at risk of developing cancer of the uterus. Progesterone hormone contributes to the protection of the uterine wall in various ways. These forms will be discussed with you by your doctor. However, PCOS does not increase the risk of ovarian or breast cancer.

### **Depression and emotional changes:**

PCOS symptoms can change how you see yourself and how you think others see you. This has the effect of lowering your self-esteem.

### **Snoring during sleep and excessive sleepiness in the daytime**

PCOS can cause extreme tiredness, fatigue, snoring during sleep and excessive sleepiness in the daytime.

## What can be done to reduce the long-term health effects of PCOS?

### Adapting a healthy lifestyle.

The main steps that can be taken to reduce health risks are:

- Eating a balanced diet. This should consist of wholesome foods, including vegetables, fruits, and dairy products. Also, the amount of sugar, salt and caffeine intake should be controlled.
- Taking regular meals without skipping meals (especially breakfast) is important.
- Consume only vegetables and fruits for dinner and minimize starchy and fatty foods as much as possible.
- Exercising regularly
- Administering medication (Orlistat)
- You can get advice for a diet plan from a doctor or a nutritionist. With this, you should take care to maintain your Body Mass Index (BMI) between 19-25.

Benefits of losing weight:

- Reduced risk of insulin resistance and diabetes
- Decreased risk of heart disease
- Decreased risk of uterine cancer
- Menstrual regularity
- Increased chance of pregnancy
- Reduces acne and unwanted body hair growth
- Developing self-esteem and being happy

### Maintaining regular health check-ups

If you are diagnosed with PCOS, you will be tested for the following;

- Diabetes: Women over 40 are recommended to have their blood sugar levels checked once a year. If your BMI is 30 or more, or if there is a high risk of diabetes according to family history, blood sugar testing is recommended before age 40.
- Endometrial cancer: If you have not had a period for a long time (more than four months) or have irregular bleeding, you should consult a doctor. You will be directed to further tests and given the necessary treatment.
- High Blood Pressure: It is important to check your blood pressure and check whether the cholesterol level in the blood is optimal.
- Depression and psychological problems: You will be referred to a counsellor or trained specialist.

### Can PCOS be cured?

PCOS condition cannot be cured entirely. Treatment aims to control the condition, control symptoms, and minimize complications. More successful results can be achieved by focusing on a healthy diet rather than controlling this condition through treatment alone. Many women manage PCOS symptoms without medical treatment and can reduce long-term health problems by following a healthy diet.