

POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The endocrine system is a network of glands and organs that produce, store, and secrete hormones. Normally, women make small amounts of “male” hormones (called androgens), but women with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) produce slightly higher amounts of androgens. This hormone imbalance causes an assortment of health problems, many of which are related to the reproductive system.

WHAT IS PCOS?

A hormonal disorder that may be characterized by a constellation of symptoms that may include:

- Irregular or absent menstrual periods
- Infertility
- Weight gain (especially at the waist)
- Acne
- Excess hair on the face and body
- Thinning scalp hair
- Skin tags
- Darkening skin
- Depression or anxiety
- Poor sleep

When the body cannot use insulin properly, it secretes more insulin to make glucose available for cells. Often linked to obesity, many women with PCOS tend to make too much insulin. The resulting excess in insulin is thought to also boost male hormone or androgen production by the ovaries.

POTENTIAL PCOS CAUSES

Although we don't know for sure what causes PCOS and none of these is a direct cause, each one is highly related to the condition.



INSULIN RESISTANCE—some women are less sensitive to insulin than normal, which makes their ovaries produce too many male hormones.



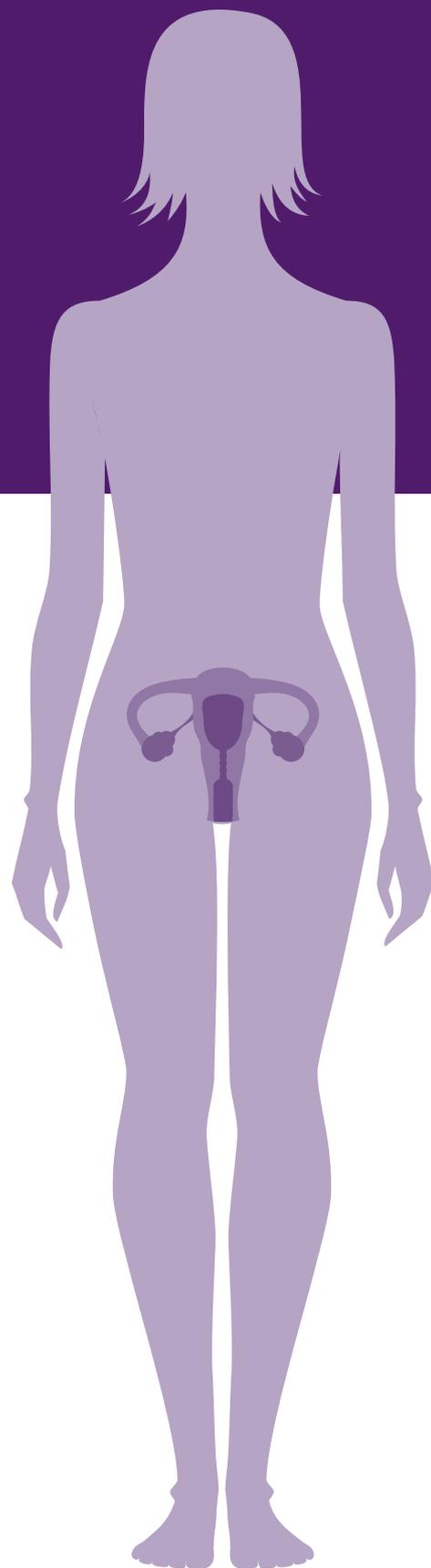
GENETICS—PCOS appears to run in families, so having a mother or sister with the condition makes you more likely to have it.



OBESITY—because women and girls with PCOS are more likely to gain excess weight and women and girls who are obese are more likely to have the condition, there is a tight, but not absolute, link between the two.

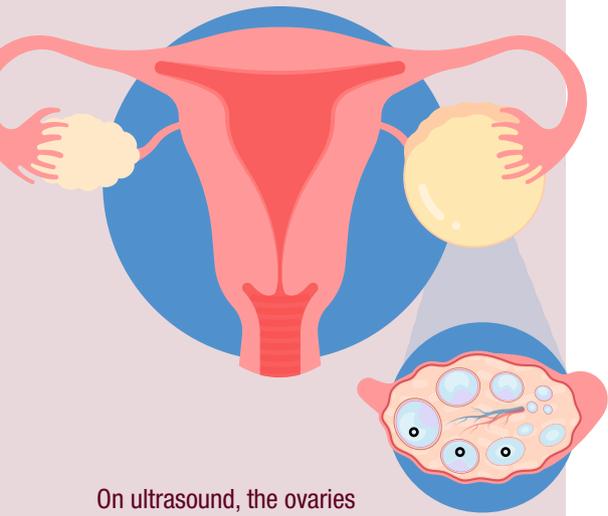


Women with PCOS often have type 2 diabetes, low levels of good cholesterol (HDL), and high levels of bad cholesterol (LDL) and other blood fats, including triglycerides. These may increase the risk of heart attack or stroke.



Visit endocrine.org for more information.

Editor: Genevieve Neal-Perry, MD, PhD



On ultrasound, the ovaries appear to have a multiple number of small follicles (also called cysts) that are often arranged in a ring around the ovary. Science indicates these are related to arrested egg development and failed ovulation.

DID YOU KNOW?

- PCOS affects **7-10%** of women of childbearing age and is one of the most common causes of infertility.
- In the United States, an estimated **5-6 million** women have PCOS.
- Sleep apnea may occur in up to **50%** of women with PCOS.
- Pregnant women with PCOS appear to have higher rates of:
 - Miscarriage
 - Diabetes during pregnancy
 - Pregnancy-induced high blood pressure (preeclampsia)
 - Premature delivery
 - Endometrial cancer

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and National Institutes of Health

PCOS CAN AFFECT A WOMAN'S:

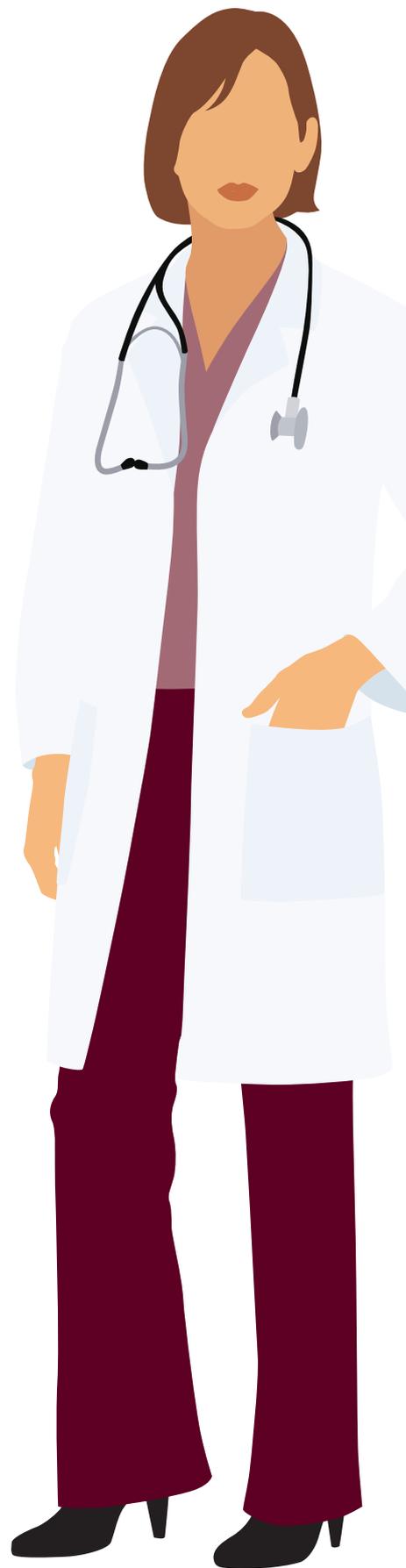
- Menstrual cycle
- Ability to have children
- Hormones
- Heart
- Blood vessels
- Appearance
- Mental health
- Risk for cancer
- Metabolic syndrome

TREATMENT

In addition to medications to help manage your symptoms, a healthy diet and brisk physical activity are nearly always part of a treatment plan for PCOS. Attention to blood sugar levels is also very important. Be sure to follow your treatment plan exactly as your doctor prescribes so you can control your PCOS symptoms and reduce risk factors that can change the quality of your life.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

- Limit processed foods
- Add more whole grains
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and lean meats
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get moving



Patients have questions. We have answers.

Endocrine Society is your trusted source for endocrine patient education.

Our free, online resources are available at endocrine.org/patient-engagement

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