

PCOD- A common problem in women today.

Dr. Rishma Dhillon Pai:

Consultant Gynaecologist : Jaslok & Lilavati Hospitals, Mumbai.

Polycystic ovarian disease or syndrome (PCOS) is a common problem which may start in the adolescence and affect the woman till her old age. In this condition the ovary has small cysts arranged in the shape of a necklace within it. This results in an abnormality of the hormones, with the male hormone dominating. As a result, the girls with this syndrome show features such as acne, excessive facial hair growth (hirsutism), weight gain and irregular or scanty menses. Though not all women show all symptoms, a combination of some symptoms may be present, Weight gain is common in about 50% of these women. This is the group which has an insensitivity to insulin in their body. Some women are thin, but have more of the male hormone influence hence more acne and facial hair. The diagnosis is made by clinical examination, sonography of the pelvis and hormones and insulin tests.

The incidence of PCOS appears to be rising or perhaps it is now being diagnosed more often. It is seen in as many as 25 – 30% of young women. The cause of this syndrome is not known, but is probably genetic and we often see mothers and daughters or sisters having a similar problem. In young girls, the symptoms are mainly cosmetic as they get disturbed by the acne, weight gain and facial hair. The treatment is usually hormonal and three weeks of treatment every month, for 9 months gives good results. The acne reduces, facial hair decrease and become finer and periods become regular with cyclical hormone treatment..

In married women, the PCOS often manifests as infertility or inability to conceive. In this condition, the ovulation may not occur regularly, and as the egg does not come out each month, the chance of pregnancy is also low. It can be treated by tablets and injections which cause the patient to ovulate and she may become pregnant. The doctor may often prescribe drugs which are used in diabetic patients, as these drugs are insulin sensitizers and improve the insulin insensitivity, which is the main problem behind PCOS. In some patients of infertility, in whom a laparoscopy (Keyhole surgery) is being done to check the womb and tubes, a laparoscopic drilling of the cysts can be done. In this the cysts in the ovary are burnt using a thin needle with an electric current passing through it. This improves the hormones and may help in achieving a pregnancy. Women with PCOS also have a high miscarriage rate. Hence medication has to continue even in pregnancy to reduce miscarriage. Also these women are more prone to developing diabetes in pregnancy (gestational diabetes) hence need to be monitored strictly in pregnancy.

These women in their 30's and 40's are more prone to diabetes and later to cancer of the uterus, if they are not careful and do not take proper medication. It is important to bring on the periods regularly with medicines if they do not come monthly on their own. This prevents hyperplasia of the lining of the womb and subsequent cancer. Women who have

periods irregularly should not neglect it and must take medicines for a long period of time if necessary, to regularize menses.

A lot of patients with PCOS are obese and one of the main treatments is lifestyle change with exercise, good diet and weight loss. This is the only thing which is effective in the long term. Only with this life style changes, can PCOS improve, otherwise it is a life long problem.

This problem of PCOS can affect women of all age groups, causes different problems at different stages of life and hence should be diagnosed early and care should be taken depending on the age of the woman and the problems she is facing. The treatment may be long term may times.

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I am 32 years, Since one year I have been getting delayed periods and have put onlots of weight. I have also got excess facial hair. What can the problem be? Rosina

Ans: It is possible that you have a problem called polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD). In this the ovaries get enlarged and develop many small cysts. These patients may present with various symptoms such as weight gain, acne, hirsutism (excessive hair growth), abnormal periods or inability to conceive. The treatment will depend on the age of the patient and the problems she is facing. The treatment is almost always hormonal. Weight loss is necessary if the patient is overweight. Sometimes drugs which are used in diabetics may also be prescribed. The surgical treatment consists of laparoscopic drilling of the cysts in the ovaries. The kind of treatment chosen is individualized to the needs of the patients.

I am 42 years old and have noticed some changes in my menstrual cycle. My sister stopped having periods when she was 42, and my mother stopped when she was 45. My periods have been getting shorter and shorter and are now down to about 15 days. Otherwise they are normal. Is this unusual? Should I be taking hormones? - Jyotsna

Ans: The age at which menopause i.e. stoppage of the periods occurs is usually around 50 years. However this is different in families and is often genetic. Few years prior to stoppage of menses they tend to become irregular, either frequent or delayed and may reduce or increase in quantity. However bleeding every 15 days is definitely abnormal and should be investigated with pelvic examination, hormone study and sonography, since there may be many other problems such as fibroids, cysts or tumours causing such symptoms. Do not neglect this problem but see a gynecologist soon. Hormonal therapy without proper investigations is definitely not to be taken.