Understanding Polycystic Ovary Syndrome

You've probably heard the term polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) before. However, you may not know what the condition is or what its symptoms are. The good news is there are steps you can take to manage the symptoms and long-term effects of PCOS.

What Are the Symptoms?

In a woman with PCOS, the ovaries don't produce enough estrogen and progesterone. Since these hormones are needed for an egg to mature, sometimes ovulation doesn't occur and the woman can't become pregnant. Lack of progesterone can also cause irregular periods or no periods at all.

Women with PCOS are also at greater risk for developing diabetes, heart disease, or cancer of the endometrium, which is the lining of the uterus.

PCOS can cause these signs and symptoms:

• Excess hair growth in certain areas, including the face, chest, and stomach.
• Thinning hair on the head.
• Skin problems, such as acne.
• Increased weight, especially around the waist.
• Insulin resistance.
• High blood pressure and cholesterol.

What Can Be Done?

Experts don’t know why some women develop PCOS, but it tends to run in families. Treatment depends on your symptoms and plans for pregnancy. Your health care provider may suggest taking the following steps:

• Observe a healthy lifestyle. All women with PCOS can benefit from maintaining a healthy weight through diet and exercise. Losing excess weight may help reduce some symptoms, such as irregular periods, lack of ovulation, and abnormal insulin or hormone levels.
• Take medications as directed. Your provider may recommend taking birth control pills unless you want to become pregnant. These can help you have a regular menstrual cycle. They can also reduce symptoms such as acne. If you want to have a baby, several medications can help stimulate ovulation.
• Reach out for support. Some women feel embarrassed, depressed, or worried as they figure out how to manage this condition, so finding support from others who are in similar circumstances can offer encouragement and emotional support.

If you notice any signs or symptoms of PCOS, talk with your doctor. Together, you can manage the condition and reduce your chance of developing other serious health issues.

If you have PCOS, find support and feedback from other women with this condition by visiting a PCOS message board. Go to www.pcoscommunity.com.
Craving ice cream? Now you can indulge with a little less guilt. The number of healthier ice cream options available is growing. But how do you choose?

You may be surprised how rich these lighter ice cream options taste. Many of them have an added fiber known as polydextrose. It reduces calories by increasing volume and creating a smooth and creamier texture.

Don’t rely on packaging alone to find healthier options. Some premium brands of “light” ice cream pack more fat and calories than the full-fat version of other brands. Take a look at the nutrition label. As a general rule, choose an ice cream that contains no more than 200 calories and two-and-a-half grams of saturated fat per serving.

A few good options include:
- Edy’s Slow Churned Light (known as Dreyer’s in the western U.S.)
- Breyer’s Smooth and Dreamy Light
- Breyer’s Double Churn Free
- Turkey Hill Light Recipe

No matter what type of ice cream you choose, pay attention to how much you eat. Nutritional information is often based on only a half-cup serving size. This is about the size of two golf balls. If you’re not careful, you could easily double or triple this amount—as well as your fat and calorie intake.

Sodium Guidelines: Does Your Knowledge Measure Up?

Sodium is an essential nutrient, occurs naturally in most foods, and helps keep packaged goods free of bacteria. However, the latest reports say almost all Americans consume too much of it. Reducing our intake by just a few grams per day could save tens of thousands of lives each year.

Salt: How Much Is Too Much?

You probably know sodium in its common food form, salt. A little bit goes a long way, and extra salt increases your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke.

The average American’s sodium intake is nearly 3,500 milligrams daily. That’s more than double the maximum of 1,500 milligrams recommended for most people and for the best heart health.

Read Labels for Best Results

Almost 80 percent of salt is added to foods before we buy them. The American Heart Association, American Medical Association, and federal and local governments are working to encourage food producers and restaurants to reduce the sodium added to prepared foods.

In the meantime, there are still ways you can slash sodium in your daily diet. Check the Nutrition Facts panel on food labels for the salt scoop. It will tell you how many milligrams of sodium each food contains. Choose combinations that add up to 1,500 milligrams per day or less. The label also lists the percentage of daily value. More than 5 percent of a nutrient is considered low, and more than 20 percent is considered high.

Key words on packaging also tell the sodium story. Here’s how to decode them:
- Sodium-free: less than 5 milligrams per serving.
- Very low sodium: 35 milligrams or less per serving.
- Low sodium: 140 milligrams or less per serving.
- Reduced sodium: the usual level is cut by 25 percent.
- No salt added: only the food’s natural sodium is included.

When in doubt, skip packaged or processed foods altogether. Eat more fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins, so you can control the sodium content. And use spices instead of salt to season food. You might taste a difference at first, but after eight to 12 weeks your taste buds will adjust to low-sodium options.

Test your sodium knowledge by taking the American Heart Association’s Scoop on Sodium quiz. Go to www.americanheart.org and type “sodium quiz” into the search box.
You may think that when it comes to the type of exercise that will help you lose weight, you just need to get your heart racing with some jogging, cycling, or aerobics. But although cardio exercise is helpful in burning calories, don’t overlook the benefits of strength training.

Strength training builds muscle, which burns more calories than body fat does. In fact, people with more muscle tend to have a quicker metabolic rate than people with less muscle, even when they’re resting. That’s why experts recommend doing strengthen ing exercises two or three times a week to help maintain or lose weight.

Even small gyms usually have an array of machines and free weights that can help you work many different muscle groups. You can also do push-ups and tummy crunches to build muscle without using weights or other gadgets. Push-ups use roughly the same muscles as a bench press. Dips are a good workout for the triceps. Squats work the legs. And crunches build abdominal muscles.

Also consider these other budget-friendly options for strength training.

• Get exercise bands. These stretchy, elastic contraptions help you work all the major muscle groups. They come in a variety of thicknesses to provide the right amount of resistance for your ability level.

• Make your own weights with common household items. A gallon jug of water weighs a little more than 8 pounds. The same container filled with sand weighs even more. For lighter weights, try lifting cans of food. ◆

For more tips of ways you can add strength training to your exercise routine, contact the Care Coordinator at 1-866-262-4764 weekdays, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST.

GRILLED VEGETABLES

Ingredients:
2 tbsp. vegetable oil
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
3 sweet potatoes, cut into 1-inch slices
3 cobs of corn, cut into 2-inch sections
1 eggplant, cut into ½-inch slices
12 green onions, trimmed

Directions:
Mix oil and garlic in a large bowl. Add vegetables and toss. Place vegetables on broiler pan or grill. Cook 10 minutes, turning twice, until vegetables are tender. Place vegetables on a platter. Serve.

Number of Servings: 6
Amount Per Serving:
Calories: 190, Total Fat: 6 g, Saturated Fat: 1 g, Cholesterol: 0 mg, Sodium: 55 mg, Total Carbohydrate: 34 g, Dietary Fiber: 8 g, Sugars: 8 g, Protein: 5 g
Member’s Success: A Healthy Connection Is a Phone Call Away

Stacy Gardner of Forest City, a retiree who lives with his “best buddy,” a dog named Sparkey, has a host of health issues. Fortunately, Stacy realized that he wasn’t really alone in managing his conditions. He reached out to the Care Coordinators available through Blue Health Solutions and made a valuable health connection.

The relationships he has formed with the Care Coordinators have proven invaluable. “They are so talented,” he says. “Their interpersonal skills are so good. They’re always there to help me; I never feel rushed.” Stacy says that he likes receiving calls because it reminds him that someone else is there, making sure that he is doing his best to stay healthy. “More importantly, they ask me if it’s okay to provide my information to my doctor too.”

The Care Coordinators also work with Stacy to prepare him for his doctor visits. “They coach me along and advise me about what questions I need to ask the doctor so I get the answers I need, including insight on my medications.”

Our experienced and specially trained nurses, dietitians, and social workers who serve as Care Coordinators for the Blue Health Solutions MyHealth Manager programs are just a phone call away. They offer information, support, and encouragement to BlueCare® members. Please feel free to call a Care Coordinator weekdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST, or visit MyHealth Manager at www.bcnepa.com.

You can talk with a Care Coordinator by calling 1-866-262-4764.