



What is Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)?

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome is the most common hormonal disorder affecting women of reproductive age. About one-in-10 women will be diagnosed with the condition.

PCOS causes irregular menstrual cycles and poor ovulation, and is one of the most common causes of female infertility.

Women with PCOS have too much insulin and the male hormone androgen. This hormonal imbalance affects the ovaries and also causes a number of other symptoms.

In women who suffer from PCOS, instead of the ovary producing follicles that release a mature egg each month during ovulation, this hormonal imbalance causes the follicles to clump together and resemble cysts (small fluid-filled sacs) that can be seen on an ultrasound.

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome is diagnosed when two of the following three criteria is met:

1. Increased androgens
2. Irregular menstrual periods
3. Polycystic ovaries seen on ultrasound.

Symptoms of PCOS

Women with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome can have a number of symptoms, ranging from mild to severe. Not all women with PCOS will have the same symptoms, but these can include:

- Irregular or absent periods
- Difficulty becoming pregnant
- Obesity, weight gain or difficulty losing weight
- Hirsutism (excess hair) on the face and body
- Hair loss on the scalp
- Skin problems, such as acne, skin tags and discolouration
- Insulin resistance (which can lead to high blood sugar levels and increased risk of developing diabetes)
- High cholesterol and abnormal lipid profile
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Sleep apnoea and insomnia
- Stress, anxiety and depression.

The oral contraceptive pill is sometimes prescribed to women with PCOS to help manage symptoms but can also suppress symptoms in someone who has not been diagnosed.