Nutrition Therapy for Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a condition that affects 5-10% of women of childbearing age. PCOS is associated with: irregular menstrual cycles, abnormal hair growth or loss, abdominal obesity, elevated insulin levels, elevated testosterone levels, polycystic ovaries, dark patches of velvety skin on neck, arms, breasts or thighs, acne, and infertility. Nearly 50% of women with PCOS are overweight or obese. Improving your diet and exercise program by making lifestyle changes may reduce your risk for developing chronic diseases associated with PCOS such as diabetes, heart disease and endometrial cancer.

WHAT IS THE RECOMMENDED MEAL PLAN FOR PCOS?

Currently there is no scientific evidence to support one particular diet for PCOS. Evidence-based recommendations suggest that women with PCOS should focus on balance and moderation. Recommended lifestyle changes include:

- Weight loss of 5-10% if overweight or obese in 3 months.
- Decreased caloric intake if weight loss is desired.
- Decreased intake of enriched carbohydrates.
- Increased fiber intake including fruits, vegetables, and beans.
- Decreased fat intake, particularly saturated fat.
- Smaller, more frequent meals (every 3-4 hours) to help control blood glucose levels.
- Balanced meals including carbohydrates, protein, and fat.
- At least 150 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity per week for diabetes prevention.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

**Consume a wide variety of whole foods**

- Foods in their most natural form (fresh, frozen, or dried).
- Fruits, vegetables, beans, legumes, whole grains, fish, lean meats, nuts, and seeds should be eaten daily.

**Aim to eat 25-30 grams of fiber per day**

- Introduce fiber gradually to your diet to minimize gastrointestinal upset.
- Choose vegetables such as broccoli, lettuce, celery, cabbage, cucumber, parsley, radishes, spinach, turnips, and watercress.
- Choose legumes such as fresh cooked kidney beans, soy beans, lentils, black eyed peas, chickpeas, and lima beans.
- Choose fruits such as strawberries, raspberries, grapefruit, apples, cherries, peaches, pears, and plums.
- Eat them as snacks, salads, sandwich fillings, in smoothies, soups, and casseroles.

**Limit sugars and enriched carbohydrates**

- Complex carbohydrates take longer than enriched carbohydrates to digest and absorb.
- Choose whole grains instead of enriched grains (brown rice, whole wheat breads and pasta, oats, barley, etc.). Look for the word “whole” as the first ingredient on the Nutrition Facts Label.
- Talk to a Registered Dietitian about the appropriate number of carbohydrate servings you need per day.

**Limit salt intake (aim for less than 2400 milligrams of salt per day)**

- Use lemon juice, mustard, vinegar, pepper, herbs and spices instead of table salt to season foods.
- Limit foods such as cured and smoked meats, salted nuts, canned and processed vegetables, meats, marinades and sauces.
- Minimize intake of processed foods.
Choose unsaturated fats

- Avoid saturated fats by choosing low fat or fat free dairy products and spreads, white meat and fish, and lean cuts of red meat.
- Look for unsaturated oils such as olive, corn, or canola oils.
- Use nuts rich in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats such as almonds, walnuts, pecans, flax seeds, sunflower and pumpkin seeds.
- Eat fish two to three times a week. Fish such as tuna, salmon, herring, sardines, and trout can improve heart health.
- Bake, grill, broil, boil, steam and microwave foods instead of frying them.

Eat protein and and/or fat with every meal or snack

- Protein has a stabilizing effect on the sugar released from carbohydrates into the blood.
- Protein can be found in lean meats, fish, poultry, dairy products, beans, nuts and seeds.

For an individualized meal or exercise plan, make an appointment with a Registered Dietitian or a Fitness Educator at the SportWell Center 244-0261.

References


The Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome Association Web site

Helping Women with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome Web site

If you are a registered University of Illinois student and you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment, please call: Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web site at: http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu