Polycystic Ovary Syndrome and Your Health

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a condition that affects 5-10% of women of childbearing age. PCOS is associated with the following symptoms:

- Infrequent menstrual cycles
- Abnormal hair growth or loss
- Central obesity
- Elevated insulin levels
- Elevated testosterone levels
- Polycystic ovaries
- Dark patches of velvety skin on neck and arms
- Infertility

Women diagnosed with PCOS are at increased risk for developing Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, uterine cancer, and osteoporosis later in life. The treatment for PCOS focuses on managing symptoms and lowering a person’s risk of long-term complications. The most immediate and successful treatment involve lifelong changes in diet and activity level. At the University of Illinois, students have free access to all the tools they will need to manage PCOS.

Nutrition counseling
Improving your diet now can reduce your risk for chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes and heart disease later in life. Choose a diet rich in whole grains, whole fruits and vegetables, and adequate calories from carbohydrates, lean protein, and unsaturated fats. Your health care provider can refer you to a dietitian at McKinley. The dietitian will evaluate your current diet and help you select the right foods for your unique lifestyle and health needs.

Half the women diagnosed with PCOS are obese and find it very difficult to lose weight. Studies have shown however, that even small amounts of weight loss (5-10% of initial body weight) can significantly improve a woman’s symptoms and long-term risk for disease. Talk to your dietitian to learn if weight loss is right for you.

SportWell Center
Your health care provider may refer you to SportWell Center for body composition analysis and exercise training. Even lean women with PCOS tend to have more fat around their belly and internal organs than normal. This distribution of fat is associated with a number of heart disease risk factors (high cholesterol, increased triglycerides, and high blood pressure). SportWell Center is a therapeutic fitness facility just for U of I students. You will receive personal attention from exercise professionals, while you train and have access to a comfortable, private workout facility.

Exercise is important whether or not you intend to lose weight. Physical activity can help your insulin levels return to normal by making muscles more sensitive to insulin. Aerobic exercise also strengthens your heart and lungs, fighting off heart disease later in life. Strength training increases your metabolism and helps keep insulin and glucose levels within a normal range. Ask your doctor or dietitian for a referral to SportWell Center.

Women’s Health Clinic
Schedule annual exams with your provider at McKinley’s Women’s Health Clinic. Your provider will work to regulate your menstrual cycle and keep you informed on the latest PCOS research. Many women diagnosed with PCOS have improved their menstrual regularity and insulin resistance after treatment with oral hypoglycemic agents. Talk to your health care provider about the benefits and side effects of these medications.

McKinley Pharmacy
If you and your health care provider choose to treat some symptoms of PCOS with medication, the McKinley Pharmacy is available to fill those prescriptions. You can order refills by phone or go to the Pharmacy directly. Most medications require $5.00 co-pay.

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