



PCOS and healthy eating

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a hormonal condition that affects about one in 10 women. This condition is associated with increased levels of two hormones in the body – insulin and androgens (male-type hormones) – that cause symptoms such as absent or irregular periods, excessive facial and body hair, pimples, weight gain and challenges with fertility.

It can be hard to manage your weight when you have PCOS. This includes maintaining a healthy weight or losing weight. Excess weight can increase the hormones responsible for PCOS symptoms.

A healthy lifestyle is the most effective approach to managing PCOS symptoms. This includes eating a balanced diet, maintaining a healthy weight and being as active as possible.

Diet

While there's no evidence that one diet is better than another in helping to manage PCOS symptoms, it's recommended women with PCOS eat a healthy, balanced diet.

A healthy diet:

- ensures you get an adequate intake of nutrients, vitamins and minerals
- helps you to prevent weight gain and lose weight (if you are overweight)

- helps to regulate hormone levels, which may improve PCOS symptoms such as acne, excess hair growth, irregular periods and challenges with fertility
- helps to reduce the risk of related health conditions such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease
- is more effective than exercise alone in achieving a healthy weight.

What is a healthy diet?

A healthy diet means eating a variety of foods from the five food groups every day. For example, vegetables, fruit, grains, lean meats and reduced-fat dairy. It's also important to focus on eating low-GI carbohydrates, which produce lower glucose and insulin levels in the blood. And drink plenty of water.

Healthy eating tips

- If you want to lose weight, it's more effective to reduce food (calorie) intake rather than follow a specific diet. Small dietary changes that can be maintained over time can lead to many health benefits.
- It's recommended that women with PCOS eat regularly (every three to four hours) to help stabilise their insulin levels. Aim to eat often but reduce portion sizes.
- For lunch and dinner, aim for half of the food you eat to be vegetables and salad.

Healthy meal and snack ideas

Breakfast

Half a cup of low-fat yoghurt, half a cup of berries and two dessertspoons of seeds and nuts.

Lunch

Salad with two cups of raw mixed vegetables (such as lettuce, cucumber, tomatoes) plus a small portion of protein (salmon, chicken, tofu, eggs).

Dinner

Stir-fried vegetables and chicken, lean meat or tofu.

Snacks

- Small handful of raw nuts.
- Unsweetened yoghurt.
- An apple or a piece of stone fruit or kiwi fruit.
- A boiled egg.
- Tzatziki, baba ghanoush or humous and vegetable sticks (e.g. carrots, cucumber, celery).

Drinks

- Drink plenty of water.
- Herbal tea (e.g. spearmint tea).
- Avoid soft drinks, fruit juice, flavoured milks and sports drinks as these contain added sugars and calories.
- Limit alcohol to no more than 1 to 2 standard drinks per day and ensure regular alcohol-free days every week.

For more healthy meal ideas, visit www.jh.today/living-with-pcos.

When to see your doctor

It's a good idea to check in with your doctor before starting a weight loss program, especially if you have other health conditions. You should also see your doctor if:

- you have been trying to lose weight without success
- your PCOS symptoms are affecting your daily life
- your PCOS symptoms are not improving despite treatment.

Your doctor might refer you to a specialist, for example, a gynaecologist, psychologist or dietitian.

For more information, resources and references visit jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/pcos

 **Jean Hailes
for Women's Health**

Phone 03 9453 8999
jeanhailes.org.au

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Disclaimer: This information does not replace medical advice. If you are worried about your health, talk to your doctor or healthcare team.

We write health information for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities. We use the term 'women', but we acknowledge that this term is not inclusive of all people who may use our content.

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