



PCOS and physical activity

What is polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)?

PCOS is the most common hormonal disorder in women of reproductive age. It 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.

Women with PCOS can gain weight and may be at increased risk of having an unhealthy weight. A higher weight can increase the hormones responsible for PCOS symptoms. A small weight loss of 5% to 10% can improve 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.

Physical activity

Physical activity is an important part of managing PCOS. It can improve symptoms and reduce the risk of developing long-term health conditions, such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

For women with PCOS, there are many benefits of regular physical activity, including:

- increased energy levels and fitness
- weight loss and maintenance
- improved self-confidence and motivation
- improved emotional wellbeing
- reduced androgen production and insulin resistance
- improved menstrual cycle regularity
- improved fertility.

What type of physical activity is best?

Research suggests that any type of regular physical activity helps to improve PCOS symptoms – even if there is little or no weight loss.

It's a good idea to do a variety of physical activities so you stay interested and motivated. The type of activity is not important. It's more important to enjoy what you're doing. For example, you might walk with a friend, join a training group or enrol in a fun fitness class. You could also walk a little further from a car park or public transport stop to work.

And remember, physical activity includes walking and household chores as well as sports and planned exercise.

Try to do some type of physical activity every day for 30 minutes and increase this over time. You can break this up into smaller sessions (e.g. 10 to 15 minutes) throughout the day.

A combination of cardio exercise (exercise that increases your heart rate and breathing) and muscle strength activity is recommended.

Preventing weight gain

For women with PCOS who want to prevent weight gain and maintain health, do 2.5 to 5 hours of moderate-intensity activity or just over an hour of high-intensity activity per week – or a combination of both. Include muscle-strengthening activities (e.g. hand weights, exercise bands, push ups and sit ups).

Losing weight

For women with PCOS who want to lose weight without dieting, prevent putting weight back on or improve health, do just over 4 hours of moderate-intensity activity or about 2.5 hours of high-intensity activity per week – or a combination of both. Also do muscle-strengthening activities on two non-consecutive days per week.

Read the 'Physical activity and exercise guidelines for all Australians'. Visit www.jh.today/health-gov-exercise-guidelines.

How to get started

You may have negative views about exercise for different reasons. If you don't know where to start or feel you might be at risk of injury, consider seeing a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist for advice and support.

When to see your doctor

You should 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.

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



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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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