





Nutrition for Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) is a condition in women that results in increased androgens (male hormones) and irregular menstrual cycles. Other symptoms commonly experienced in women with PCOS include:



- Excessive abdominal weight
- Acanthosis nigricans (dark, discolored patches on skin)
- Hair loss from head (alopecia)
- Excessive hair growth on face and other parts of body, including navel and inner thighs (hirsutism)

Approximately 50-80% of women with PCOS have insulin resistance, a condition in which your body does not respond appropriately to the normal amount of insulin produced by your body. As a result, women with PCOS are at a high risk for developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome. Changes in diet and lifestyle have been shown to reduce the risk for disease and improve symptoms among women with this condition.

Nutrition Goals for Improving PCOS:

- Consume a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, and beans. 
- Consume protein-containing foods such as lean meats, poultry, and eggs with meals and snacks to add fullness and help manage blood sugar levels.
- Select foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, a type of polyunsaturated fat. Examples include fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines and albacore tuna), seeds (flax seeds, chia seeds), oils and nuts (walnuts). 
- Avoid simple sugars and refined carbohydrates.
- If overweight, weight loss of 5 to 10 percent of total body weight has been shown to improve insulin resistance and other symptoms of PCOS.

Tips for a Healthy PCOS Lifestyle:

- Eat a colorful variety of fresh fruits and vegetables every day to get a wide range of protective nutrients. For example, accessorize salad greens with tomatoes, sliced cucumbers, red onions and bell peppers. 
- Choose whole grains—they provide more fiber than processed grains—which can lower insulin resistance. Whole grain sources include whole wheat, spelt, bulgur, amaranth, barley, buckwheat, oats, brown and wild rice, quinoa, rye, corn and popcorn.
- Consume dark leafy greens like kale, Swiss chard, collards, mustard greens and spinach. These foods are rich sources of fiber, vitamins and minerals. 
- Limit sugar-sweetened beverages and foods like desserts. A high sugar content in the diet increases insulin resistance.
- Engage in moderate or vigorous intensity aerobic activity on most days of the week for weight loss and maintenance. Remember to check with your doctor before beginning a new exercise program.

Athletes with PCOS have specific needs and are advised to seek the assistance of a registered dietitian for a personalized eating plan. Visit the SCAN website at www.SCANDpg.org to locate a sports RD.

Tips to Take with You:

- Choose whole grains. Avoid processed grains.
- Avoid foods and beverages containing more than 2 grams of sugar per serving.
- Eat every 3 to 5 hours to manage blood sugar levels.
- Be active by engaging in some form of physical activity each day.
- Achieve or maintain a healthy weight.

Since women with PCOS typically have a cluster of symptoms, they should consult a registered dietitian for a personalized eating plan. To find an RD near you, visit: www.eatright.org

Resources

1. Grassi A. PCOS: The Dietitian's Guide. 2nd ed. Luca Publishing Haverford, PA 2013.
2. Grassi A. Polycystic ovary syndrome. In: The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetic's Nutrition Care Manual. Chicago, IL. 2012.
3. Moran LJ, Misso ML, Wild RA, Norman RJ. Impaired glucose tolerance, type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome in polycystic ovary syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Human Repro Update. 2010;16(4):347-363.
4. Mozaffarian, D, Aro, A, Willett, WC. Health effects of trans-fatty acids: experimental and observational evidence. Eur J Clin Nutr. 2009;63(2):S5-21.

Contact SCAN
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Written by SCAN registered dietitians (RDs) to provide nutrition guidance. The key to optimal meal planning is individualization. Contact a SCAN RD for personalized nutrition plans. Access "Find a SCAN RD" at www.scandpg.org or by phone at **800.249.2875**.