

Nutrition Tips for Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)



If you have Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), eating well can help manage some of the long term complications of this condition. Read on to learn about how food and nutrition can help you.

What is PCOS?

PCOS is a condition that affects women. It is caused by an imbalance of a woman's sex hormones which may lead to:

- Menstrual cycle changes
- Skin problems such as acne
- Increased hair growth on the face and body
- Cysts in the ovaries and
- Trouble getting pregnant

PCOS affects up to 10 percent of women. The cause is not yet known. It may be genetic since women with PCOS are likely to have a mother or sister with PCOS. Women are usually diagnosed in their 20s or 30s, or sometimes when they are teenagers.

PCOS and weight gain

If you have PCOS, your body makes too much androgen. If your body makes too much androgen, it can lead to weight gain, especially around the belly area. This type of weight gain can increase the risk of:

- [High cholesterol](#)
- [High blood pressure](#)
- High blood sugar
- [High triglycerides](#)
- Heart disease
- [Type 2 diabetes](#)

Tips for maintaining a healthy weight with PCOS

There is no specific diet that can prevent or treat PCOS. However, making nutritious food choices and being active can help manage some of the long term complications of PCOS.

The best eating plan if you have PCOS is one that helps you lower the long term risks of diabetes and heart disease. This plan should be low in [saturated fat](#) and [high in fibre](#). Start by making balanced food choices following [Canada's Food Guide](#).

Choose healthy fats:

Too much saturated and trans fat in the diet can lead to high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Limit foods that contain saturated and trans fats. Instead of these fats, choose healthier unsaturated fats, which are found in vegetable oils like canola and olive oil, avocado and nuts. You can learn more about choosing healthy fats [here](#).

Increase fibre:

Eating more [fibre](#) can help maintain blood sugar levels and lower your cholesterol. Plus, it's good for your digestive system and helps you feel full. Aim for about 25 grams per day. Here are some high fibre foods to try:

- Fruit – especially berries, pears, oranges, figs, kiwi

- Vegetables – especially peas, spinach, squash and broccoli
- Whole grains – such as oats, brown rice, whole wheat, quinoa, barley and buckwheat
- Legumes – such as lentils, chickpeas, soybeans and kidney beans
- Cereals made with wheat bran, psyllium or whole grain oats
- Nuts and seeds – such as almonds, flax, sunflower seeds

Enjoy protein:

Make sure that you have some protein at every meal. Choose protein foods that come from plants more often. Plant-based protein foods can provide more fibre and less saturated fat than other types of protein foods. Try to eat protein foods such as beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds and tofu as well as lean meats and poultry, eggs and fish.

Foods to limit:

Some foods cause weight gain if you eat them often. Choose fewer foods that are high in sugar, salt, refined flour and fat such as:

- White rice, pasta or bread
- Cookies, packaged desserts, muffins and cereal bars
- Soda and sugary drinks
- Deep fried or battered foods like French fries and chips
- Sweets like candy and chocolate

Be active:

Try to get at least 2 ½ hours of moderate exercise each week. Start with 10 minutes of activity and work up to longer times as your body adjusts. Check out this helpful article for tips to get started.

Are there any supplements that can help my PCOS?

There has been limited research to be able to recommend specific supplements or natural health products to reduce PCOS symptoms. Supplements should only be recommended by your dietitian or health care provider. For example, some women with PCOS may benefit from a vitamin D supplement if they are deficient or may benefit from taking omega-3 and probiotics.

A dietitian can:

Give you a personalized eating plan to help manage your PCOS symptoms that considers your preferences, medical history, culture and lifestyle

Make sure you are getting enough of the essential nutrients like fibre, protein, vitamin D and omega-3

Suggest any supplements you would benefit from

Help you learn how to read food labels and prepare nutritious meals

Bottom line

There is no specific diet that can prevent or treat PCOS. However, eating a nutritious and balanced diet and being active can help manage some of the long term complications of PCOS. An eating plan that is high in fibre and low in saturated and trans fat can help lower the risk of heart disease and diabetes.

This article was written and reviewed by dietitians from Dietitians of Canada. The advice in this article is intended as general information and should not replace advice given by your dietitian or healthcare provider.

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