



the acupuncture pregnancy clinic

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) is a condition that affects fertility and blood sugar metabolism. It is the most common endocrine disorder found in young women.

Causes

We don't know what causes PCOS but certain genes are probably involved; most likely those related to the production of testosterone and those that predispose to insulin resistance. On top of this, events in the womb (like nutritional deficiencies or pesticide exposure) and lifestyle factors during early and middle life (like weight gain or stress or hormonal contraceptive use) can contribute to the development of PCOS.

Insulin Resistance

As humans we are still genetically 'wired' to thrive on the habits of our ancestors, who consumed nutrient-rich, low carbohydrate foods and who engaged in more physical exertion than we do today. Unhealthy lifestyles of the modern day plus a genetic predisposition can cause the pancreas to overproduce insulin in an attempt to maintain normal blood glucose levels. The body reacts by reducing the number of insulin receptor sites on the cells. The resulting insulin resistance seen in PCOS patients makes it hard to lose weight and causes many metabolic problems.

Weight

Many PCOS patients (50-80% in the west) are overweight, especially round the abdomen. Even average weight women with PCOS tend to have a high waist-to-hip ratio, indicating increased abdominal fat mass. Women with PCOS often have an increased susceptibility to weight gain and/or find it harder to lose weight than women who don't have PCOS. This is because high levels of insulin encourage increased fat storage and elevated androgen levels increase cravings for carbohydrates.

What can I do?

There is much you can do with lifestyle modification, stress reduction and specific treatment to help manage PCOS.

Losing Weight

Weight loss improves fertility by increasing ovulation frequency and the follicular environment in which the eggs mature. It also improves insulin resistance and general health. This is not so easy for women with PCOS but the good news is that a relatively small weight loss and body fat redistribution is often all that is needed. Losing just 5% of initial body weight, enough to change the waist-to-height ratio, will improve metabolic function and will promote more ovary activity.

Diet

In general, high protein, low carbohydrate meals are recommended because they are relatively low calorie, they do not raise blood sugar or insulin levels too much, and they manage hunger well. But a variety of approaches, including calorie counting and time restricted eating, can be successful if weight loss is desired.

Exercise

Exercise is an important part of a weight loss program because it can improve insulin sensitivity, so that there is less insulin present in the blood and hence less glucose is converted to fat. High intensity interval training has been shown to reduce insulin resistance effectively with a very small time commitment. Additionally, exercise specifically shrinks abdominal fat cells and it reduces the level of those stress hormones that promote visceral fat deposits. Plus it makes you feel good.

Stress

Stress is implicated both in the cause and worsening of PCOS and women with PCOS often have a heightened response to stress. Elevated cortisol levels can exacerbate both androgen and insulin levels. Hence stress management is of paramount importance.

Acupuncture

Research into the treatment of PCOS with acupuncture has been pursued vigorously in many clinics around the world. These trials have examined the effect of acupuncture on increasing ovulation frequency, reducing insulin and testosterone levels, hyperstimulation in IVF and weight loss. Acupuncture is also often called on to help reduce stress, and stress hormone levels.

Please speak to our practitioners for the programme best suited to your needs.