

## PCOS Nutrition

### *Eating for health when you have polycystic ovarian syndrome*

Eating to treat PCOS is not much different than how many people are advised to eat to be their healthiest. We know that improvements in nutrition and eating patterns can:

- Lower insulin and *androgen* (male hormone) levels
- Reduce many of the physical symptoms of PCOS
- Cause ovulation to occur
- Improve your general health and mood

### Eat a Balanced Diet

It is best to eat variety of healthy foods that give your body a balance of carbohydrates, protein, and fat.

### Carbohydrates

Healthy carbohydrates include whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes (beans), and milk. Moderate portions of these foods cause gentle rises in insulin after you eat them, and this helps keep blood sugar levels stable. The fiber in most of these foods slows the rise in blood sugar. The protein in milk and other dairy foods slows the rise in blood sugar.

Some tips about carbohydrates:

- Space your carbohydrate foods evenly throughout the day. A good goal is 2 to 3 servings at each meal if you want to lose weight, and 3 to 4 servings at each meal if you want to maintain your current weight.
- One serving of carbohydrates is equal to: A 1-ounce slice of whole-wheat bread, one 6-inch tortilla, one small fruit,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup fresh fruit,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup legumes (beans),  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup whole grain cereal,  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup whole grain pasta or brown rice, 3 cups of popcorn or 1 cup milk or yogurt.



*A balanced diet includes a variety of healthy foods.*

- If you like to eat packaged cereal, read the Nutrition Facts labels before you buy. Choose brands with:
  - 5 grams or less of sugar per serving
  - 5 grams or more of fiber per serving

## **Proteins**

Proteins help our bodies heal. Protein does not get converted into glucose, so it does not raise insulin levels the way carbohydrates do.

Healthy protein foods include:

- Lean meat and poultry
- Fish and other seafood
- Eggs
- Low-fat or nonfat milk and other dairy foods
- Legumes (beans)
- Nuts
- Soy

## **Fats**

Like protein, the fats we eat do not break down into glucose. But, fats can have a negative effect on insulin levels, so it is important to eat only moderate amounts of fats. We need some fat in our diets to help our bodies absorb nutrients. But remember that fats have more than twice as many calories per gram as carbohydrates and proteins do.

Healthy sources of fats include:

- Fatty fish (tuna, salmon, trout, and others)
- Fish oil supplements
- Nuts and seeds
- Egg yolks
- Canola and olive oils
- Avocado

Limit how much you eat of these unhealthy types of fat:

- Saturated fats (in animal sources of food)
- Trans fats (in many fried and processed foods)

You can avoid most unhealthy fats by choosing lean and low-fat meat and dairy products and by limiting foods like crackers, store-bought desserts and pastries, and French fries.

Some tips about healthy fats:

- Include some fatty fish, walnuts, and pumpkin and flax seeds in your diet. They contain essential omega-3 fatty acids that help improve your cholesterol levels and protect against heart disease.
- If you do not like these foods, try using fish oil supplements.

## **Planning Your Meals and Snacks**

- **Base your meals and snacks on healthy carbohydrate choices, and include some protein or fat.** This combination of foods will help your blood glucose and insulin rise slowly and stay at a healthy level between meals. It can also help you feel satisfied longer.
- **Change your eating pattern to include smaller meals with light snacks in between.** This will also help keep your blood sugar and insulin levels steady, and will keep you from getting too hungry. Eating every 3 to 5 hours works well for many women with PCOS or other blood sugar and insulin issues.
- **Try these nutrient-rich foods for your snacks:**
  - Almonds or other nuts and dried or fresh fruit
  - Low-fat or nonfat yogurt
  - Whole-grain toast with nut butter
  - Vegetable sticks and hummus
  - Cheese or tuna with whole-grain crackers
  - Cottage cheese with berries or other fruit
- **Avoid sweetened beverages and foods that contain refined carbohydrates like candy, sweetened cereals, cake and pastries, white bread, and anything else made with sugar or white flour.** These foods can cause high blood sugar and insulin levels.

## **Healthy Eating Tips**

Here are more tips for healthy eating:

- Learn and practice “mindful” eating. This means eating only when your body needs fuel, not when you are bored or you have a craving.

- Eat at least 5 total servings of fruits and vegetables every day. These foods are full of nutrients, and most are low in calories. Along with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, you get important *phytochemicals* (natural plant compounds) that can help ease the hormonal imbalances that come with PCOS.
- If you like fruit juice, choose brands that are 100% real juice, and drink it in moderation. Whole fruit is a more healthful choice than fruit juice because it contains fiber. This means its natural sugars are absorbed more slowly than the sugars in juice.
- Limit or avoid caffeine, artificial sweeteners, and nicotine. These can increase your insulin levels, even if you do not have high blood glucose.
- Keep a food journal to help you see your eating patterns clearly. This makes it easier to find areas where you could make changes.

## **Moving for Health**

Along with eating a balanced diet, getting regular physical exercise can help with many of the issues and health concerns of PCOS. Getting and staying active can help you:

- Improve ovulation
- Manage your weight
- Keep your cholesterol and blood pressure in a healthy range

When you increase your physical activity, your body can also absorb more glucose without the help of insulin. This means your pancreas will not have to produce as much insulin.

## **Other Benefits of Exercise**

Being active can also help you reduce stress. Less stress is important to your health for many reasons:

- Chronic stress can raise levels of the hormone *cortisol*:
  - Cortisol makes it easy to store fat around your abdominal organs. This is especially true if you tend to eat more when you feel stressed.
  - Cortisol can also make estrogen imbalances worse. This can interfere with normal periods and fertility.
- Stress also makes the body take glucose from storage and release it into your blood. This makes your insulin levels rise, which can also cause you to store body fat.

Exercise is good for your mind, too. Moving more often can boost your mood and improve your body image.

How much exercise do you need? Plan to do 30 minutes of moderate activity a day, such as brisk walking. Doing light activity in addition to moderate activity each day is also helpful. It will help you cut back on how much time you might spend watching television, using the computer, or other inactive things.

## To Learn More About PCOS and Nutrition

### Books

- ***The PCOS Diet Plan: A Natural Approach to Health for Women with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome.*** Hillary Wright (2010).
- ***The PCOS Workbook: Your Guide to Complete Physical and Emotional Health.*** Angela Grassi (2009).
- ***Appetite Awareness Workbook: How to Listen to Your Body and Overcome Bingeing, Overeating and Obsession with Food.*** Linda W. Craighead, PhD (2006).
- ***Intuitive Eating***, 3rd edition. Evelyn Tribole & Elyse Resch (2012).
- ***Before Your Pregnancy: A 90-Day Guide for Couples on How to Prepare for a Healthy Conception.*** Amy Ogle, MS, RD, and Lisa Mazullo, MD (2011).
- ***The New American Plate Cookbook: Recipes for a Healthy Weight and a Healthy Life*** (2005).
- ***The Ultimate Omega-3 Diet.*** Evelyn Tribole (2007).

### PCOS Websites

- PCOS Nutrition Center: [www.pcosnutrition.com](http://www.pcosnutrition.com)
- Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome Association, Inc.: [www.PCOSsupport.org](http://www.PCOSsupport.org)
- SoulCysters: [www.soulcysters.com](http://www.soulcysters.com)
- [www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)

### Healthy Nutrition Websites

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Nutrition Clinic:  
206.598.6004