



Living Well with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)



If you have Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), take charge of your health by learning all you can about it. You can start right here by learning about healthier habits and routines. You also can check out more information in the Body section of girlshealth.gov under “What is PCOS?”. You’ll find everything from medications to getting rid of unwanted hair. If you take smart steps to cope with PCOS, you’ll feel better physically, but chances are you also will feel pretty proud of yourself for taking good care of your body — and your future.

Eating right and exercising are two terrific ways to manage your PCOS. They can lower your blood sugar to healthier levels, help get your hormones balanced, reduce your risk of developing other health problems, and help you lose weight. And if you’re overweight, losing even 10 percent of your current weight can help get abnormal periods back on track.



Eating Right with PCOS

Many young women with PCOS are overweight and have trouble losing weight. This is because young women with PCOS often have higher levels of the hormone insulin in their blood. Insulin’s main job is to control blood sugar, but it also can make your body store fat. Eating right can help you control your insulin, help you feel better, keep your heart healthy, lower your risk of getting diabetes, and help you lose weight. Losing even a small amount of weight if you are overweight can improve PCOS symptoms.

What do I need to know about insulin and carbohydrates?

The insulin level in your blood goes up after you eat. It goes up the most after you eat or drink something

that contains carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are found in grains (bread, pasta, rice, cereal, and potatoes), vegetables, fruits, most snack foods (like chips, cookies, and candy), and sweet drinks like juice.

Are all carbohydrates the same?

No. If you eat two foods that have the same amount of carbohydrate, they may have a different effect on your insulin level. This effect has a lot to do with the type of carbohydrate the food has. Carbohydrate foods with fiber are usually the best if you are trying to keep your insulin level down. Carbohydrate foods with a lot of sugar cause insulin levels to go up and make you hungry sooner.

Try to choose high-fiber, low-sugar carbohydrate foods most of the time.

Instead of:	Choose:
Sweetened juice, canned fruit in heavy syrup, or sweetened applesauce	Fresh fruits or canned/frozen fruit with no sugar added or unsweetened applesauce
Starchy vegetables like potatoes, corn, and peas	Non-starchy fresh or canned vegetables like carrots, spinach, or tomatoes
Refined grains made with white flour like white bread, white pasta, and white rice	Whole grains or darker grains like whole wheat pasta, brown rice, and whole wheat bread
Sugary cereals and sweetened grains like cereal bars, breakfast pastries, and donuts	High-fiber cereals like Shredded Wheat or All Bran. Try to have a cereal that has at least 5 grams of fiber per serving. Sprinkle ¼ cup of bran cereal or unprocessed bran on a low-fiber cereal to increase the fiber
Sugary drinks like soda or juice	Sugar-free drinks like water, diet soda, flavored water, and seltzer water
Sugary foods like cookies, cakes, and candy	Sugar-free foods like sugar-free gelatin, popsicles, yogurt, and pudding

Do I need to buy special foods?

You definitely don't need to go out of your way to buy special foods! Just like with any healthy diet plan, your meals should include mostly vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean meats, and healthy fats. Most foods fit into a healthy diet for PCOS, but you should read food labels to help you pick the best choices. As you choose foods, consider these tips:

- **Look for high-fiber grains rather than low-fiber grains.** That means whole wheat bread instead of white bread, for example, and brown rice instead of white rice.
- **Don't be fooled by fat-free treats.** They usually have a lot of added sugar. Look for brands that have the least amount of sugar and the most fiber.
- **Be careful when picking sugar-free foods.** Some sugar-free foods (like baked goods) can raise your insulin levels because they have other high carbohydrate ingredients like white flour. Other sugar-free foods have no effect on insulin because they are also carbohydrate-free. These foods (diet soda, sugar-free drinks, and sugar-free popsicles) make great additions to a PCOS diet.
- **Choose vegetables and fruits!** They are high in fiber and packed with vitamins and minerals.

What about non-carbohydrate foods like fats and proteins?

Non-carbohydrate foods include protein foods like meat, chicken, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, peanut butter, and vegetarian meat substitutes. They also include fats like oil, butter, cream cheese, and salad dressing. Combining foods that contain protein or fat with a carbohydrate will help keep insulin levels down. For example, instead of having bread by itself, have it together with some peanut butter or hummus.

Keep in mind that some fats are much healthier than others. Healthy fats are found in olive oil, canola oil, nuts, avocados, and fish. Choose healthy fats and proteins over butter, margarine, mayonnaise, full-fat cheese, and red meat.

Do I need to follow a diet that is extra high in protein?

No. Really high protein diets are not good diet options for teens because they can be low in some important nutrients such as fiber, the B vitamins, and vitamin C. It is also important to remember that even if you limit your carbohydrate intake, overeating fat

or protein can cause weight gain. You should aim for a diet that has some protein, carbohydrate, and fat.

If I choose the right foods, do I need to worry about my portion sizes?

Yes! How much you eat has a big effect on your insulin level. This means it is usually better to have small meals and snacks during the day than it is to have 3 large meals.

If you have more questions about PCOS and nutrition, ask your doctor about talking to a nutritionist who has experience in working with teens with PCOS.

Stay positive! It can take time to lose weight. Remember that taking care of yourself by eating right is a **huge** success even if you don't see a big change in your weight.



Staying Fit with PCOS

Exercise can be a great help if you have PCOS. Young women with PCOS often have high levels of the hormone insulin. Having high levels of insulin tells your body to store fat and may contribute to PCOS symptoms. But exercise can lower your levels of insulin. Any increase in exercise helps, so find an activity, sport, or exercise that you like. Exercise can be especially helpful in bringing down insulin after a meal. Regular exercise can also help improve your mood and boost your energy.

If you aren't exercising a lot now, build up slowly. Work toward exercising for 60 minutes every day.

Making exercise fun is the key to keeping it an ongoing part of your life. This guide includes 3 worksheets to help you figure out which types of exercise you'll enjoy most and how to get started with them.

Get ready, get set, and go with these 3 steps:

1. Complete **Worksheet 1: Focus on Fitness** to figure out what goals can motivate you, what activities you'll enjoy, and how to free up time for fitness.
2. After deciding what will motivate you, go to **Worksheet 2: Fun Fitness** to pick from a list of activities.
3. When you've chosen your activities, fill in **Worksheet 3: Fitness Planner** to put exercise into your weekly routine.

Worksheet 1: Focus on Fitness

My Fitness Motivators and Health Benefits

What makes you want to exercise? Check off and write in your top motivators and benefits.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have more energy | <input type="checkbox"/> Improve my PCOS symptoms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Release stress from my body | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Develop a healthier and stronger heart | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manage my weight | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

My Everyday Activities

You can move your body more by changing some everyday activities. Check off and list some ways you can get more active.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walk instead of taking the bus | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Take the stairs instead of the elevator | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clean my room with extra zing! | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

My Physical Activities

If you like riding your bike or playing a sport, you can exercise and have fun. Think about what you might enjoy that burns some energy and gets your heart going.

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ride my bike instead of getting a ride | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dance to my favorite tunes | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

My Time to Get Fit

You'll need to make room for exercise in your busy schedule. Think about where you can fit in a few extra workouts. Check off or list some strategies that will help you make time for fitness.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mark work-out dates on my calendar | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mix social time & fitness: Exercise with a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Add one more workout per week | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cut down TV and Internet time | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

My Fitness Goals:

Having clear goals can be a great motivator and help keep you focused. Check off or write in your top 3 fitness goals for the next month.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Learn a new sport | <input type="checkbox"/> Start a walking club with friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Try a new dance or aerobics class | <input type="checkbox"/> Be outside and get fresh air |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use the Fun Fitness program in this guide | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Try an exercise DVD | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Join a sports team | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Good job! You've finished your worksheet! Now you're on your way to getting started with your new fitness program. Keep this sheet where you can see it every day to help you stay focused on your goals.

Now it's time to pick exercises from the Fun Fitness program.

Worksheet 2: Fun Fitness

Our **Fun Fitness** program is designed to get you going in 3 different areas of fitness.

- **Stretch It** exercises keep you flexible and relaxed, and can help prevent injuries, like pulling a muscle.
- **Move It** has aerobic activities to help keep your heart strong and manage your insulin levels and your weight.
- **Tone It** has strength exercises to build strong and active muscles and increase your metabolism,

so your body does a better job burning food for energy.

Take a look at the exercises from each of the **Fun Fitness** sections. Check off the ones you want to try, and use the extra lines to fill in others you'd like to do. Remember to pick activities that are safe and within your fitness level. If you don't know how to do some of these exercises, try taking a class, borrowing a DVD or book from your library, or getting instructions online. Be sure to choose items from each column for a balanced workout.

Stretch It	Move It	Tone It
Upper Body	<input type="checkbox"/> Hiking	Upper Body
<input type="checkbox"/> Biceps	<input type="checkbox"/> Biking	<input type="checkbox"/> Overhead Shoulder Press
<input type="checkbox"/> Triceps	<input type="checkbox"/> Power Walking (walking at a faster than normal pace, but not quite a running speed)	<input type="checkbox"/> Chest Press
<input type="checkbox"/> Chest	<input type="checkbox"/> Jumping Rope	<input type="checkbox"/> Bent Knee Push Up
<input type="checkbox"/> Upper Back	<input type="checkbox"/> Dancing	<input type="checkbox"/> Biceps Curl
<input type="checkbox"/> Cross Shoulder	<input type="checkbox"/> Soccer	<input type="checkbox"/> Triceps Extension
Middle Body	<input type="checkbox"/> Aerobics Class	Middle Body
<input type="checkbox"/> Back	<input type="checkbox"/> Tennis	<input type="checkbox"/> Sit Up
<input type="checkbox"/> Abdominal	<input type="checkbox"/> Field Hockey	<input type="checkbox"/> Isometric Sit Up
<input type="checkbox"/> Waist Reach	<input type="checkbox"/> Kick Boxing	<input type="checkbox"/> Side Twist Sit Up
Lower Body	<input type="checkbox"/> Kick Ball	<input type="checkbox"/> Front Arm Raise
<input type="checkbox"/> Hamstring	<input type="checkbox"/> Running	Lower Body
<input type="checkbox"/> Inner Thigh	<input type="checkbox"/> Track	<input type="checkbox"/> Inner Thigh Lift
<input type="checkbox"/> Outer Thigh	<input type="checkbox"/> Volleyball	<input type="checkbox"/> Outer Thigh Lift
<input type="checkbox"/> Quadriceps	<input type="checkbox"/> Basketball	<input type="checkbox"/> Power Lift Kick
<input type="checkbox"/> Lunge	<input type="checkbox"/> Skiing	<input type="checkbox"/> Squat
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Ice Hockey	<input type="checkbox"/> Calf Lift
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Ice Skating	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
<input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Step Aerobics	<input type="checkbox"/> _____
	<input type="checkbox"/> Yoga	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Pilates	
	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	
	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	
	<input type="checkbox"/> _____	

Great! You've hand-picked the exercises you'd like to try. The last step toward getting your fitness program going is to add these activities into your weekly calendar.

Worksheet 3: Fitness Planner

In order to really **do** the activities you've chosen, you have to make **time** for them. This worksheet will help you plan your fitness schedule so exercising becomes part of your weekly routine.

Look back at your completed Fun Fitness worksheet and copy your fitness items into the calendar below. Think about which activities will work best on which days and what are good times for the different activi-

ties. Make sure to have a balanced mix of stretching, moving, and toning. You don't have to do all 3 in one day, but schedule your week so you're not doing only one type of exercise.

After you've created your fitness schedule on this worksheet, it's a good idea to mark the days that you plan to exercise on your own calendar or planner. Put this worksheet someplace where you'll see it to remind you of what's coming up.

Day, Date, and Time	Activity
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

Congratulations! You thought about what motivates you. You've selected different fitness activities, and you've planned your exercise goals. By completing these 3 worksheets, you've taken a big step toward becoming healthier and fit. Be proud of yourself, and keep up the good work!



Visit <http://www.girlshealth.gov> for more information on fitness, dealing with stress, and building a healthy future!

