

Managing PCOS
FOR
DUMMIES®

by **Gaynor Bussell**



John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

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Published by
John Wiley & Sons, Ltd
The Atrium
Southern Gate
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 8SQ
England

E-mail (for orders and customer service enquires): cs-books@wiley.co.uk

Visit our Home Page on www.wiley.com

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data: A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-470-05794-0

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Bell & Bain Ltd, Glasgow

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



About the Author

Gaynor Bussell is a Registered Dietitian, a Nutrition Consultant, and a member of various professional nutrition organisations, including the Nutrition Society and the British Dietetic Association.

Gaynor began specialising in women's health after taking a short career break to have her two daughters. She worked as a women's health dietitian for over six years at University College Hospital in London, specialising particularly in PMS, menopause, preconception health, eating disorders and, of course, PCOS. She also covered the osteoporosis clinic at this hospital. During this time Gaynor became dietary adviser to a women's health charity.

Since then Gaynor has worked at various women's health clinics including those at Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's. She was also the dietitian for a private residential eating disorders centre. Gaynor continues to see private patients who have women's health issues and/or eating disorders. She also continues to work with various women's health organisations and charities, and writes and gives talks on various aspects of women's health.

Gaynor currently works as a consultant for the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) where her role includes acting as the interface on nutritional matters between industry and UK and EU authorities and sitting on a number of decision-making committees.

Author's Acknowledgements

Thanks to the excellent team at Wiley, in particular Rachael Chilvers and Alison Yates who kept me encouraged and did not shout too much when deadlines were missed!

Thanks to my family: David and my two daughters, Sally and Jenny. Thanks guys about being good-natured and understanding about my 'being on a roll' so that dinner didn't get served until 10 p.m., again!

Thanks to my work colleagues at the Food and Drink Federation who allowed me to take the time out to write the book and always took an interest in how things were coming along.

Finally, thanks to the team at Next Generation gym. You sorted out my mouse-strained shoulder and gave me excellent workout plans. It was great to go to you as a bolt hole when I needed to think, de-stress, and pound the life out of a treadmill!

Publisher's Acknowledgements

We're proud of this book; please send us your comments through our Dummies online registration form located at www.dummies.com/register/.

Some of the people who helped bring this book to market include the following:

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Introduction

When you're diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), you may feel pretty low – PCOS isn't a nice condition and doesn't yet have a cure. However, the good news is that you can keep the symptoms more or less completely at bay. This doesn't happen simply by taking a pill or two; you have to put in the effort yourself, and you aren't going to see results overnight. That's not a message that everyone likes to hear in today's instant gratification society. The rewards are huge though – you get your life back and you feel so fit and well that you don't want to return to your old lifestyle.

Put simply, you need to live a healthy life to keep PCOS under control. Lose any excess weight, get fit, tone up, and eat food that's going to do the best for your body. All this doesn't need to be dull and boring: Being physically active can be fun and it certainly lifts the mood and gives you a buzz. Have a peek at the recipes in this book and you soon realise that the diet for PCOS is tasty, easy to make, and sure to be liked by your friends and family, too, so no excuse for social exclusion!

About This Book

When you're first told that you have a particular medical condition, you're given a whole heap of advice from different people, including your friends and your Auntie Nelly! And, more than likely, different bits of advice are contradictory. You may have looked up PCOS on the Internet, or leafed through a few books about it. You may even have read articles about it in popular magazines, or read about some celebrity who cured herself by eating nothing but peanut butter sandwiches. Well, what's a girl to do?

This book gives you down-to-earth and up-to-date advice. It tells you what's worked and what hasn't for PCOS sufferers, and takes you through what you can be doing for yourself to help reduce your PCOS symptoms, mostly in the area of diet and exercise. I also briefly cover the medical treatments available for PCOS, but only so that you're aware of what's available and what route your doctor or specialist may want to take you down.

Conventions Used in This Book

The following conventions are used throughout this book to help keep things consistent and easy to understand:

- ✓ All Web addresses appear in `monofont`.
- ✓ Both metric and imperial measurements appear in the recipes. Follow either system – just don't switch halfway through a recipe or it'll end in tears! American measurements are also included (as cups). For certain ingredients that are known by more than one name, both names are used with one in brackets, such as 'courgette (zucchini)'.
- ✓ All the recipes are followed by the nutrient breakdown per serving.
- ✓ A little tomato symbol next to a recipe means that it's suitable for vegetarians.
- ✓ The following terms are used as a shortened abbreviation:
 - 'Calories' is used to mean kilo calories (kcal).
 - 'Carbs' is used to mean carbohydrates.
 - 'Sat fat' is used to mean saturated fat.
- ✓ Nutritionists commonly use metric terms such as gram (g), milligram (mg), and microgram (mcg) to describe quantities of protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals, and other nutrients. This book does as well.

What You're Not to Read

If you want to get straight to the nitty-gritty, and extract all the vital bits as quickly as possible so you can make a start on what you need to do, you can skip the following bits and still accomplish your goal:

- ✓ **Text in sidebars.** These shaded boxes appear here and there throughout the book. They share anecdotes and observations, but aren't essential reading.
- ✓ **Anything with a Technical Stuff icon attached.** This information pumps you with a few more technical facts or background about a particular subject, but isn't essential reading if you don't want to know the why, but just the how!

Of course, when you're ready (and have the time or curiosity to spare), remember that these pieces of info are well worth dipping into.

Foolish Assumptions

Every *For Dummies* book is written with a particular reader in mind, and this one is no exception. So, I made the following basic assumptions (rightly or wrongly) about you:

- ✔ You're not a doctor so don't have the technical understanding about the PCOS condition, but you are interested in getting a basic understanding of it.
- ✔ You have the condition, and you want to know how to reduce your PCOS symptoms so that you can improve your quality of life.
- ✔ You're confused about the right dietary and exercise route to take to get you on track to reducing your symptoms.
- ✔ You're dissatisfied with quick fixes, fads, and wonder diets and treatments and need a realistic alternative that works.
- ✔ You want straight talking, understandable information. You want to know enough to help yourself to feel better, but don't need to become an expert on PCOS.
- ✔ You don't want to spend hours digging around for information but want a one stop shop that's going to cut to the chase but not mislead you.

How This Book Is Organised

The great thing about *For Dummies* books is that you don't have to read them all the way through. You can simply turn to the bit you want – a chapter, a section, even just a paragraph. The table of contents and the index help you out. This section gives you an idea of what lies ahead.

Part 1: PCOS in a Nutshell

When you're initially diagnosed with any condition, the first order of business is getting a good enough understanding so that 1) you're not terrified or panicky and 2) you can make good decisions about how to take care of your health. So in this part, I give you basic information about PCOS: what it is, what causes it, what symptoms may accompany it, what changes you can expect as you age, and – most importantly – how you can take control and manage it.

Part II: Taking Control of Your Diet

Your diet can really help to control symptoms of PCOS. This part covers following a balanced low glycaemic index (GI) diet, whether simply to control PCOS or also to lose weight. As many PCOS sufferers tend to be overweight, this part is full of helpful and practical tips to keep the weight off.

Part III: Recipes for Life

Part 3 is very practical, explaining how watching the calories and the GI gets translated into actual meals and recipes. You don't need to look at another recipe book with these chapters! As well as tips and advice, the recipes cover breakfasts (Chapter 6), lunches and starters (Chapter 7), snacks (in Chapter 8 and, yes, they are allowed!), and last but not least dinners and puds (Chapter 9). The recipes also include some indulgent ones and meals you can safely serve up at a dinner party.

Part IV: Other Helpful Stuff for PCOS

This part looks at other ways that you can help to reduce your PCOS symptoms, including the importance of physical activity. When you have PCOS you may well be tempted to try all sorts of other 'cures' that you find out about. Part 4 sorts out the good from the bad, and points out the downright ugly of these so called 'cures'. PCOS is often accompanied by psychological problems such as depression, loss of control, and stress, so this part helps you find the right balance between body, mind, and spirit. Finally, this part gives you some really down to earth advice on what to do to ensure that you maximise your chances of getting pregnant and having a beautiful bouncing baby.

Part V: The Part of Tens

This part contains five lots of ten tips, which form a quick reference guide. Most of these tips are mentioned throughout the rest of the book, but this part brings them all together as a handy reference. You can find tips on the PCOS symptoms that you can diminish by using the advice in this book; how to distinguish the good diets from the bad; good reasons for following a low-GI diet; and ten superfoods you can incorporate into your diet to help reduce your PCOS symptoms. Finally, Chapter 18 lists ten organisations that offer support and advice to people like you who have PCOS or have a close friend or relative with it.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons are a handy *For Dummies* way to catch your attention as you slide your eyes down the page. The icons come in several varieties, each with its own unique symbol and meaning.



Your understanding of the health and diet world may be riddled with myths or old wives tales. Some of them may be based on truth, but most came from another planet and don't apply to human beings living today on earth. This symbol means that the myth has been exposed for what it is!



This symbol marks the place where you can find explanations of the terms used by nutrition experts. Skip them if you like, but expanding your understanding is always good, if you have the time!



This icon draws your attention to an important point to bear in mind about dealing with PCOS.



These details add to your understanding of PCOS. You can get on in life perfectly all right without them, so skip them if you want to, but try a few first – they may give you some facts that may help you to answer the questions in obscure quiz shows!



The Tip icon does exactly what it says – cherish these little nuggets because they're there to make your life a little easier.



This icon points to certain pitfalls or things that may actually harm you. Ignore at your peril!

Where to Go from Here

Where to go from here? Wherever you like, and you certainly don't need to read from cover to cover, unless you like to follow tradition! You can dive right in anywhere in the book, because each chapter (and even each section) delivers a complete message. The table of contents is detailed enough to help you to pinpoint the area you want to know about, and you can use the index.

6

Managing PCOS For Dummies

If you want to know more about exercising to achieve weight loss, go straight to Chapter 10. If you want a healthy but tasty recipe for dinner tonight, jump to Chapter 9.

If you're really not sure where to start, read Chapter 1, which gives you all the basic information about PCOS and helps you to decide which area you want to home in on first.

Part I

PCOS in a Nutshell

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



“Fortunately for you, Ms. Dobbins, at this clinic we firmly believe in alternative medicine.”

In this part . . .

This part gives you an overview of everything PCOS-related, and helps you to identify whether you have PCOS by listing all the symptoms.

In this part you get some straight facts about your condition, how it plays out in your body, how it changes when you change (such as when you get older or heavier) and how you can start to tackle it.

Chapter 1

Sensible and Straightforward Solutions for a Difficult Condition

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding PCOS and its symptoms
 - ▶ Looking at treatment options
 - ▶ Working out what you can do to help yourself
-

This chapter is a great place to start to get on the right course if you suffer or suspect you suffer from PCOS, or if you have a friend, relative, or partner with the condition and you want a quick overview of the most important things you need to know about it.

This chapter gives an overview of the entire book; so in one chapter you get a feel for what PCOS really is and what its symptoms are. Most importantly you get an overview of treatments that are aimed at reducing the symptoms, mostly looking at what you can do for yourself.

Understanding PCOS

PCOS is the most common ovarian function disorder in women during the period of time before the menopause arrives. An estimated 20 per cent of women have polycystic ovaries (PCO), but despite having small cysts on their ovaries, they don't have any symptoms of PCOS. For actual PCOS, where definite symptoms are present, the incidence in women is as high as 5–10 per cent and the rate appears to be increasing.

Defining the condition

According to the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, PCOS is defined by having any two of the following signs and symptoms:

- ✓ Lack of ovulation for an extended period of time (which probably manifests itself as the stopping of your monthly period).
- ✓ High levels of androgens (male hormones).
- ✓ Many small cysts on the ovaries (normal ovaries have 5–6 follicles (cells), whereas polycystic ovaries have ten or more).



The hormones involved in controlling periods, and ultimately reproduction, are produced in the pituitary gland located in the brain. In PCOS two of these, called luteinising hormone (LH) and follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), are produced in proportions that are off kilter. The imbalance of these two hormones is thought to prevent the follicles in the ovary from developing properly: They tend to remain small and don't mature enough to release an egg. As a result, a string of small follicles forms on the ovary giving rise to the characteristic polycystic ovary.

Trigger factors

PCOS is often described as being a condition of hormone imbalances and probably has a genetic basis, so you may inherit it from a parent. You are more likely to develop PCOS if:

- ✓ You have a relative with PCOS (female relative of course!).
- ✓ You have a relative with type 2 diabetes (male or female).
- ✓ Your father went bald prematurely (yes, honest, it's true!).

Obesity is also believed to act as a trigger to PCOS in women with a genetic pre-disposition.

You Know You Have PCOS Because . . . : The Symptoms

The symptoms of PCOS vary from woman to woman and can be present in any combination. They can also change over time and so, if you have PCOS, your symptoms are likely to be different from someone else you know with PCOS.

The most common PCOS symptoms include the following:

- ✓ Weight gain, especially around the tummy.
- ✓ Increased hairiness on the face and other regions (called *hirsutism*).
- ✓ Male pattern baldness or thinning hair.
- ✓ Oily skin with acne.
- ✓ Absent or irregular menstrual cycles which leads to infertility.

For detailed information on the symptoms of PCOS, go to Chapter 2.

Weight gain

Not being able to control weight gain is often the most distressing symptom in PCOS, and unfortunately the rate of obesity in women with PCOS is 50 per cent. If you have found that you are gaining weight easily, you are likely to find that it tends to go on around your middle, a condition that your doctor or specialist calls 'central adiposity'.



The symptoms of PCOS are more severe if you gain a lot of weight; as you lose weight, the symptoms diminish. If you are an overweight woman with PCOS even a modest weight decrease of 5 per cent leads to:

- ✓ A decrease in your insulin level.
- ✓ An improvement in your menstrual cycle (or acts as a trigger for it to start again).
- ✓ Reduced testosterone levels leading to reductions in hirsutism and acne.

Emotional manifestations

If you have PCOS you are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, irritability, and mood swings. In fact it can seem as if you have premenstrual syndrome (PMS); the difference is that in PCOS, the symptoms don't just appear before a period.

The emotional symptoms that accompany PCOS may be due to one, or all, of the following:

- ✓ Hormone disturbances.
- ✓ A host of upsetting symptoms caused by PCOS.
- ✓ The stress of living with a long-term medical condition.

Another emotional manifestation of PCOS is the tendency toward eating disorders. A link exists between having an abnormal eating behaviour and PCOS. Binge eating and bulimia is more common than in the general population: 1 per cent of women have bulimia in the general population, whereas 6 per cent of women who have PCOS are bulimic. Go the section 'Looking after the inside' for basic info on dealing with an eating disorder; for detailed information about these disorders and PCOS, head to Chapter 2.

Insulin resistance

You may be told that you have insulin resistance if you have PCOS, but this is not something you can see, although it does lead eventually to physical conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. Insulin resistance, with the resultant high level of circulating insulin, is very common in PCOS. This condition is due to the muscles becoming resistant to the action of insulin, so that more insulin has to be pumped out to have any effect. Insulin resistance is more likely if you gain weight.

One of insulin's functions in your body is to help your cells take up glucose which is used to create energy. If you're insulin resistant, not only do you end up feeling tired and lacking in energy, but also, because your cells can't utilise the glucose in the blood, blood sugar levels rise, resulting in type 2 diabetes. Type 2 diabetes is known as a silent but deadly condition because its symptoms can go unnoticed for many years, by which time damage to the eyes and kidney may have occurred and risk factors for heart disease increased.

Insulin resistance also leads to the development of abnormal levels of fats in the blood with rising levels of harmful cholesterol increasing your chances of having heart disease or a stroke. Again you don't know you have high cholesterol unless you have a blood test.



Insulin resistance is the root of most symptoms in PCOS. When insulin resistance is present, normal amounts of insulin are insufficient to bring down blood glucose levels, which are a result of consuming carbohydrates. Your pancreas has to make even more insulin to compensate, which leads to a rise in the amount of insulin circulating through your body. High insulin levels mean that:

- ✓ Your body stores more fat resulting in weight gain.
- ✓ Your ovaries produce more testosterone which has an adverse effect on the reproductive hormones that control the formation of follicles in the ovary. The result is that your menstrual cycle may become irregular or your periods may even stop altogether.