

# Healthy Eating and PCOS

This leaflet provides information for maintaining a healthy balanced diet with a diagnosis of Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

## What is PCOS?

PCOS is a condition affecting approximately 1 in 10 women in the UK where a large quantity of harmless follicles (small sacs formed by a group of cells) are found in the ovaries, which are often unable to release an egg meaning ovulation does not occur. In more than half of women with PCOS it is symptomless; however, symptoms can include irregular periods, fertility issues, excessive hair growth, hair loss, acne, oily skin and weight gain. PCOS can lead to abnormal levels of hormones in the body, to include increased insulin levels.

Chronically high levels of insulin can cause insulin resistance, leading to increased food cravings which can make losing weight more of a challenge.

## What are some top tips for maintaining a healthy weight and diet with PCOS?

1. **Eat regularly** – aim for 3 balanced healthy meals and 2 snacks each day to stabilise blood sugar levels and reduce the risk of insulin resistance occurring.
2. **Opt for wholegrain carbohydrates with a low glycaemic index (GI) (see below)** - GI is a score given to different carbohydrates based on the affect they have on blood sugar levels. The lower the GI which will lead to a slower rise in blood sugar levels, reducing the insulin response in the body.
3. **Balanced meals** - Balanced meals should contain protein rich food, healthy fats and vegetables and a low GI high fibre carbohydrate source.
4. **Aim to include omega-3 fatty acids in the diet** - Commonly found in oily fish (i.e. salmon, mackerel, sardines) these healthy fats are associated with reducing inflammation and the risk of insulin resistance. Plant-based sources of these fatty acids can be found in chia seeds, flaxseeds, walnuts and algae/seaweed. Aim for 1-2 portions/week

## How do I approach weight management within a diagnosis PCOS?

- Set achievable goals with a target of losing 0.5-1kg each week
- Avoid crash diets (short term, restrictive diets leading to rapid but often unsustainable weight loss) which can increase stress and further impact on blood sugar levels - aim for sustainable changes to your diet with a focus on foods you can add into your diet rather than remove
- Increase the amount of fruit and vegetables in your diet

- Reduce your intake of calorie dense foods high in fat and sugar
- Consider what will keep you motivated i.e. keeping a food diary, making changes as a family
- Increasing activity levels – To include cardiovascular exercises (e.g. running or HIIT workouts); strength workouts (e.g. Weights or Pilates); or gentler exercises (i.e. yoga or long walks)

## What are the tips for following a low GI diet?

- Include a low GI starchy carbohydrate and low-fat protein source with each meal
- Pay attention to the portion sizes you are having
- Include a range of low GI fruits and vegetables
- Remember low GI does not necessarily mean healthy (e.g. chocolate cake– may have a low GI)
- When planning a meal chose lower GI alternatives from the list below

	<b>Low GI (55 or less)</b>	<b>Medium GI (56-69)</b>	<b>High GI (70+)</b>
<b>Breads</b>	Rye, Burgen, granary, multigrain	Wholemeal, muffin, crumpet, malt, pita bread	Bagel, baguette, white bread
<b>Cereal</b>	Porridge, special K, all bran	Shredded wheat	Rice Krispies, corn flakes, sugary cereal e.g. coco pops,
<b>Grains and pasta</b>	Pasta, buckwheat, bulgar wheat	Basmati, couscous, quinoa, pearl barley	Brown and white rice, rice cakes, crackers
<b>Potatoes</b>	Sweet potato	Boiled or new potatoes,	Fried, instant, roasted, mashed or baked potato
<b>Fruit</b>	Apples, pears, citrus fruits, kiwi, cherries, plums, grapes, dried pear, dried apricots, dried peaches, mango, prunes	Mixed dried fruit, fresh apricot, fruit juice, sultanas, banana, raisins, dried figs	Dried dates, melons, jam and marmalade
<b>Pulses and beans</b>	Lentils, beans, e.g. baked, kidney,	Semolina	Popcorn, broad beans
<b>Vegetables</b>	Peas, carrots	Beetroot, corn	Parnsips, turnips

## Example menu

Breakfast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low fat yogurt with a bran cereal and slices of banana</li> <li>• Poached egg on rye toast and low fat spread with grilled tomatoes</li> <li>• Porridge made with skimmed milk topped with frozen cherries and seeds</li> <li>• Lean bacon, baked beans, mushrooms, egg, spinach and multigrain toast</li> <li>• Breakfast smoothie with banana, mango, skimmed milk and oats</li> </ul>
Lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baked beans on wholemeal toast with mushrooms</li> <li>• Tinned/packet/home-made bean soup with seeded/wholegrain bread</li> <li>• Omelette with mushrooms, peppers, cherry tomatoes</li> <li>• Sardines on wholegrain toast</li> </ul>
Dinner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5% beef mince with wholemeal spaghetti in a tomato sauce with added vegetables</li> <li>• Grilled salmon with brown rice, steamed broccoli and cauliflower</li> <li>• Chicken casserole with kidney and butter beans.</li> <li>• Sweet potato dhal with basmati rice</li> <li>• Chicken and mushroom stir fry with rice noodles</li> </ul>
Snacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rye crispbreads with cottage cheese</li> <li>• Boiled egg</li> <li>• Celery stalks, Baby corn and cucumber sticks with guacamole</li> <li>• Natural yogurt with a spoonful of almonds</li> <li>• Oatcakes with small portion of peanut butter</li> </ul>

## How much exercise should I be doing?

A minimum of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity is recommended per week. This averages out to around 20 minutes a day of exercise.

Increasing exercise in your everyday life	Free NHS resources to increase your exercise levels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stand rather than sit when you can</li> <li>• Trial getting off the bus a stop earlier and walking or parking a little further away</li> <li>• Take the stairs instead of the lift or escalator</li> <li>• Try to walk or cycle with children to school</li> <li>• Try to include a quick walk after mealtimes if possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active 10 app – Tracks and builds up your daily walks</li> <li>• Couch to 5K – Running app for beginners</li> <li>• Home workout videos</li> <li>• NHS Fitness Studio videos</li> <li>• NHS exercise guides</li> </ul>

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your diet, please contact the dietitians on 020 8725 8055 (Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5pm).

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111

