



# PCOS *Guide*

THREE KEY PILLARS TO  
MANAGING PCOS  
NATURALLY

# PCOS BASICS

## What is it?

Struggling with PCOS? Or wondering if you may have it?

**Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a hormone imbalance** that affects roughly 1 in 10 women of reproductive age. And it's the **most common cause of infertility** worldwide.

Some women with PCOS develop cysts on their ovaries. Hence the name, polycystic ovary syndrome. But many women with PCOS have no cysts or any symptoms at all! That's why up to 70% of women with PCOS are undiagnosed.

## PCOS Causes

The jury's still out on the exact cause of PCOS. But according to research, it's linked with the following:

- **Insulin resistance:** This hormone helps glucose get inside your cells. Some people become resistant to insulin, triggering the body to make more insulin. Excess insulin can affect the ovaries' ability to release eggs and lead to weight gain.
- **High androgens:** Women with PCOS often have high levels of male hormones (androgens) like testosterone.
- **Chronic inflammation:** Low-grade inflammation is common among women with PCOS, which increases androgens.
- **Excess weight:** PCOS is linked with obesity. The hormonal imbalances of PCOS can also lead to weight gain. It's the ultimate catch-22.

The good news is, PCOS *can* be managed with some simple dietary and lifestyle shifts. And that's exactly what we'll cover in this guide! Read on to learn the 3 pillars to managing PCOS naturally.

## PCOS Symptoms

- Irregular periods
- Infertility
- Hair loss
- Excess body & facial hair (hirsutism)
- Weight gain, especially around the belly
- Acne on the face, chest, or back
- Skin tags on the armpits or neck
- Depression or anxiety
- Ovarian cysts

# PILLAR #1: BALANCE BLOOD SUGAR

*Why it's important*

Around 65-70% of women with PCOS suffer from insulin resistance. This increases the risk of diabetes and can trigger a cascade of hormonal issues, *including* high androgens.

That's why the first pillar to managing PCOS is to improve insulin sensitivity. So how do you do that? Balance your blood sugar. Here are a few ways to do that:

## Avoid sugary foods

High-sugar foods like candy, cookies, cake, soda, and even dried fruit spike your blood glucose, increasing your body's demands for insulin. To keep your blood sugar steady, avoid sugar-laden foods. Also steer clear of added sugars like honey, maple syrup, and agave nectar. Opt for sugar-free sweeteners like monk fruit instead.

## Be choosy with carbs

Your body breaks down carbs into glucose. That's why starchy foods like pasta, crackers, bread, and white rice spike your blood sugar. To keep your blood sugar steady, avoid processed and refined carbs and choose complex carbs like sweet potato, lentils, and quinoa. These foods are high in fiber, which slows the digestion of carbs and lessens the glucose spike.

## Eat balanced meals

Protein, fat, and fiber all slow the digestion of carbs and promote satiety. So aim for balanced meals with a good mix of protein, healthy fats, and fiber. Here are a few examples:

- Salmon (protein), quinoa (fiber) & green salad w/olive oil dressing
- Scrambled eggs (protein) with sauteed veggies (fiber) & avocado (fat)

## Don't eat carbs "naked"

Snacking on carbs on their own can cause massive blood sugar spikes. For this reason, it's best to pair carbs with protein or fat. This helps blunt the blood sugar spike from carbs. Here are some examples:

- Brown rice cake with nut butter
- Fruit with cottage cheese
- Berries with Greek yogurt
- Whole grain toast with avocado

# PILLAR #1: BALANCE BLOOD SUGAR

## Continued...

Here's a handy cheatsheet with some of the *best* and *worst* foods to maintain blood sugar balance:



### Foods to Enjoy

- **Wholesome foods** that haven't been processed
- **Fiber rich foods** like beans, legumes, berries & apples
- **Leafy green veggies** like kale, spinach, lettuce, chard & arugula
- **Non starchy vegetables** like cauliflower, broccoli, peppers, zucchini, mushrooms & cabbage
- **Whole grains** like brown rice, oats, quinoa, millet & buckwheat
- **Healthy fats** like olive oil, avocados, nuts & seeds
- **High quality protein** like wild salmon, organic chicken & pasture raised eggs



### Foods to Avoid

- **Processed foods** like chips, microwave meals, cereal & packaged snacks
- **Refined grains** like white rice, white pasta, white bread & other foods made with refined flour
- **Sugary foods** like candy, cookies, cake & pastries
- **Sugary drinks** like soda and sports drinks
- **All forms of added sugar** including honey, maple syrup, molasses & agave nectar
- **Dried fruit** like raisins & dates which are high in sugar

# PILLAR #1: BALANCE BLOOD SUGAR

*Continued...*

Here's a couple other hacks that can help your blood sugar stay balanced:



## Exercise

Regular exercise helps your muscles burn glucose and improves your body's sensitivity to insulin. Not to mention, exercise boosts your mood, helps with weight management, and improves fertility. To keep your blood sugar and PCOS symptoms in check, aim for 30 minutes of physical activity most days. Walk, swim, bike, dance, garden, do some yoga, lift weights, try an online workout.

## Myo-inositol

Inositol is a type of sugar your body makes. It affects the signaling of neurotransmitters and hormones, including insulin. Research shows supplementing with inositol can improve insulin sensitivity and reduces androgen in women with PCOS. There are nine different forms of inositol. But based on the research, myo-inositol seems to be the most effective for PCOS.



# PILLAR #2: BALANCE ESTROGEN

*Why it matters*

Women with PCOS often suffer from estrogen dominance. This is a **hormonal imbalance where your body has too much estrogen and not enough progesterone.**

Progesterone is a hormone your body makes after you ovulate. So if you skip a menstrual cycle or don't ovulate, which are both common with PCOS, progesterone levels suffer.

This can cause estrogen to get imbalanced relative to progesterone, which may worsen PCOS symptoms. That's why the second pillar to managing PCOS is to balance estrogen. Here are a few ways to keep estrogen in check:

## Ditch xenoestrogens

Xenoestrogens are chemicals that mimic estrogen. They're found in plastics, pesticides, perfume, and many cosmetics and personal care products. Xenoestrogen exposure can cause estrogen levels to get too high. That's why it's best to avoid them. Here's are a few ways to do that:

- Choose organic foods
- Swap out plastic food containers for glass
- Opt for natural, non-toxic personal care products and cosmetics ([EWG's Skin Deep database](#) can help with this)

## Eat estrogen detox foods

Your body has to detox estrogen. When it doesn't, that excess estrogen recirculates, which can contribute to estrogen dominance. The good news is, certain foods can help your body clear excess estrogen. These include cruciferous vegetables like:

- Broccoli
- Cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Arugula
- Brussels sprouts
- Kale

Eating more of these foods can help keep your hormones in balance.

# PILLAR #2: BALANCE ESTROGEN

*Continued*

Keeping your detox pathways open is also key to clearing excess estrogen. Here are a few ways to support your body's detoxification:



## Sweat it out

Sweating helps your body release excess estrogen via your skin. Exercise and sauna sessions are two easy ways to break a sweat. Many gyms and spas have saunas nowadays, or you can try a portable option like a [sauna blanket](#).



## Drink more water

Drinking plenty of water softens your stools to keep them moving. This helps your body clear excess estrogen in your poop. Aim to drink at least 64 ounces of water each day to keep your bowels moving.



## Do a castor oil pack

This folk remedy stimulates the lymphatic system and promotes liver detox. All you need is a piece of wool or cotton flannel, some castor oil, and a heating pad. If you're new to castor oil packs, [this video](#) will walk you through it.



## Take milk thistle

This herb has liver-protective properties that may support your body in detoxing estrogen. As an added bonus, it's shown to [decrease blood sugar](#) and lower inflammation, both key to treating PCOS.

# PILLAR #3: REDUCE INFLAMMATION

*Diet*

The third pillar to managing PCOS is addressing chronic inflammation. And keeping an anti-inflammatory diet is a good place to start. Here's a peek at what that looks like:



## Inflammatory Foods to Avoid:

- Processed foods
- Refined carbs (white bread, white rice, sweets, etc.)
- Fried foods
- Foods with added sugars or high-fructose corn syrup
- Vegetable oils
- Foods with trans fats
- Processed meats like hot dogs, cold cuts, and bacon
- Red meat
- Soda & other sugar-sweetened drinks
- Alcohol



## Anti-Inflammatory Foods to Enjoy:

- Olive oil
- Fresh fruit
- Veggies, especially leafy greens
- Fatty fish like salmon, sardines, & mackerel
- Nuts & seeds
- Avocadoes
- Green tea
- Red wine
- Dark chocolate
- Antioxidant-rich spices like turmeric, cinnamon, & garlic



# PILLAR #3: REDUCE INFLAMMATION

*Lifestyle habits*

Food isn't the only thing that creates inflammation. Smoking, stress, lack of sleep, and other unhealthy lifestyle habits can too. Here are a few lifestyle hacks to keep inflammation at bay:

## **Upgrade your sleep**

Women with PCOS often struggle with sleep, and lack of sleep creates inflammation. That's why sticking to a regular sleep schedule is crucial for PCOS. Aim for 7-9 hours of shut-eye each night. Keeping your bedroom dark, quiet, and cool can help you sleep more soundly. And avoiding screens 1-2 hours before bed may help you hit the hay more easily.

## **Try omega-3s**

Omega-3 fatty acids are a potent anti-inflammatory. Research shows taking omega-3 supplements can help reduce inflammation in women with PCOS. Eating salmon, sardines, chia seeds, flaxseed, chia seeds, and walnuts can help you get your omega-3s. Taking a fish oil can also help you get your fill of this nutrient.

## **Keep a lid on stress**

Chronic stress creates inflammation and causes a cascade of hormonal imbalances. So to manage PCOS, keeping stress in check is a must. Try to carve out time for relaxation each day, even if it's just 5 minutes. Meditation, mindfulness, yoga, and deep breathing can all help you unwind and melt away stress.

## **Get morning sun**

Morning light exposure does double duty for PCOS. It syncs up your circadian rhythm, helping you get a more restful night's sleep. And better sleep equals better hormone balance. Plus, it gives you a free dose of vitamin D, a nutrient with powerful anti-inflammatory properties. Aim for 5-15 minutes of morning sunlight each day. Drinking your morning coffee or tea outside is an easy way to do this.