PCOS Awareness Month 2023: How PCOS Affects Woman At Different Life Stages? See What Experts Say

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Women with PCOS are more likely to develop other health conditions including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and rarely endometrial cancer

Navigating PCOS At Different Life Stages (Image Source : Getty)

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a common hormonal disorder that affects around 1 in 10 teenage girls and young women in whom small cysts are seen in both the ovaries identified on ultrasound scan. Exact cause for PCOS is not known and it can be long standing throughout life with no permanent cure, however treatment can improve symptoms. PCOS can cause hormonal imbalance leading to irregular periods, excess acne and unwanted hair on the face & body due to increased androgen levels, weight gain and difficulty in conceiving which in turn makes PCOS a leading cause of infertility.

Dr Kameswari S, who is a Senior Consultant Gynaecologist and Head, Dept of Gynaecology, at Fernandez Hospital said, "Women with PCOS are more likely to develop other health conditions including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease and rarely endometrial cancer (cancer of the inner lining of the uterus). It can also lead to anxiety, depression and a negative body image due to weight which in turn can affect family relations and work. Management is tailored to the priority symptom and life style change is the main treatment."

Additionally, Dr. Vaishali Joshi, who is a Consultant, Obstetrician & Gynaecologist at Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital Mumbai said, "A metabolic syndrome called PCOS affects women of all ages. Several symptoms are present, including irregular periods, weight gain, excessive body hair, and acne, along with hormonal imbalances shown in blood tests and polycystic ovaries on ultrasound"

PCOS At Different Life Stages:

Dr. Vaishali Joshi listed down the things that happen in different lifes stages as a result of PCOS:

- PCOS is a lifestyle disease. Many teenage girls limit their physical activity at this period of hormonal and sexual maturation, possibly as a result of peer pressure or test stress, and they begin to put on weight. Period abnormalities and acne are two frequent issues girls experience.
- When a woman is an adult and wants to create a family, PCOS can result in anovulation (not ovulating). This may make it difficult for them to get pregnant, and they could need fertility therapy. Pre-eclampsia-like issues and gestational diabetes are possible in PCOS-affected pregnant women.
- PCOS can cause abnormal period bleeding in women in their 40s or later during perimenopause, which can result in anaemia. Due to high hormone levels, the uterine lining might thicken and become vulnerable to early or precancerous alterations that can result in uterine cancer.
- The metabolic syndrome linked to PCOS typically develops by the time women reach their forties and begin to experience diabetes, high cholesterol, and blood pressure issues, which can have an effect on the health and life expectancy of women.

Symptoms Of PCOS At Different Life Stages:

Dr. Aruna Kalra, who is the Director – Obstetrics and Gynaecology, at CK Birla Hospital, Gurugram said, "For appropriate management and assistance, it is essential to know how PCOS changes and adapts over different life stages."

1. Adolescence (Ages 12-19):

- PCOS can appear in adolescence, often after the start of menstruation. Acne, excessive hair growth, irregular periods, and weight gain are all possible symptoms of PCOS in teenagers.
- Since PCOS can affect self-esteem and body image at this period, managing it is very crucial.
- Encouragement of a balanced diet and consistent exercise is essential for managing insulin resistance, a problem that is widespread in PCOS, as well as for keeping a healthy weight.
- Teenagers' emotional health should also not be disregarded because PCOS sufferers frequently experience disorders like anxiety and depression.

2. Mid Years (Ages 20-40):

- PCOS can have a substantial impact on fertility during these years.
- The regularisation of menstrual cycles and the relief of painful PCOS symptoms require constant monitoring and management of hormone levels.
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including a balanced diet and consistent exercise, is essential not only for managing weight but also for managing insulin resistance, which has a big impact on reproductive results.
- Equally important is the recognition of the emotional toll that infertility can take, necessitating the incorporation of mental health support, such as therapy or participation in support groups, to help individuals cope with the emotional stress that often accompanies PCOS-related fertility challenges.

3. Menopause and Beyond (Ages 40+):

- As people approach menopause, PCOS symptoms can either worsen or get better.
- While some PCOS-related symptoms may naturally diminish or change with age, others, like weight management and insulin resistance, continue to demand attention and prioritizing symptom management remains crucial.
- Furthermore, considering the potential increased risk of osteoporosis among individuals with PCOS, it is advisable to incorporate calcium and vitamin D supplementation into one's regimen to promote bone health.
- Regular cardiovascular check-ups are equally essential, as PCOS individuals may face an elevated risk of heart disease, necessitating ongoing monitoring and preventive measures.

Tips For Managing PCOS At Different Life Stages:

Here are some general tips for managing PCOS at different stages shared by Dr Kameswari S:

1. Diagnosis and Education (Teenage Years and Beyond):

- If you suspect you have PCOS or have been diagnosed, educate yourself about the condition.
- Consult a healthcare provider for a proper diagnosis and understanding of your specific case.

2. Lifestyle Management (Teenage Years and Beyond):

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle through balanced nutrition and regular exercise.
- Manage stress through relaxation techniques like yoga or meditation.
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption.

3. Medication and Hormonal Therapy (Depending on Need):

- Some individuals may require medication to manage symptoms, regulate periods, or improve insulin sensitivity. Consult with a healthcare provider for appropriate treatment options.

4. Fertility and Family Planning (Reproductive Age):

- If you plan to have children, discuss fertility options with a specialist early on.
- Some may require fertility treatments like ovulation induction or in vitro fertilization (IVF).

5. Regular Check-Ups (Throughout Life):

- Continue regular check-ups with your healthcare provider to monitor PCOS-related health risks.
- Adjust your treatment plan as needed, especially if you experience changes in symptoms.

6. Menopause and Beyond (Peri-menopause and Menopause):

- PCOS symptoms may change as you enter perimenopause and menopause.
- Discuss hormone replacement therapy (HRT) options with your healthcare provider if needed.

7. Mental Health Support (Throughout Life):

- PCOS can impact mental health. Seek support from therapists or support groups when needed.
- Addressing anxiety or depression is important for overall well-being.

8. Dietary Management (Throughout Life):

- Maintain a diet that helps regulate insulin levels and manage weight, as insulin resistance is common in PCOS.
- Consider consulting a registered dietitian for personalized nutrition guidance.

9. Self-Care and Advocacy (Throughout Life):

- Be an advocate for your own health. Don't hesitate to seek second opinion if necessary.
- Prioritize self-care and mental well-being to manage stress.

10. Stay Informed (Throughout Life):

- Stay updated on the latest research and treatment options for PCOS.
- Knowledge can empower you to make informed decisions about your health.

[Disclaimer: The information provided in the article, including treatment suggestions shared by doctors, is intended for general informational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.]

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