

## MEDICATIONS FOR POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME



Medications for PCOS can decrease insulin resistance or decrease androgen ('male' hormones) levels. Your doctor may prescribe one or more of these medications.

### Estrogen and progesterone ('female' hormones)

Your doctor may prescribe progesterone alone to produce a period (Provera® Challenge), and then place you on oral contraceptives (birth control pills) or progesterone only treatment to keep your periods regular. This treatment is important to keep the lining of your uterus healthy.

### REMEMBER!

The OCP does not protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you have sex, use a condom to prevent STIs.

### Oral contraceptive pill (OCP-the 'birth control pill')

Birth control pills (OCP) contain two hormones: estrogen and progesterone. The OCP:

- helps to decrease the amount of androgens produced by the ovaries
- helps to control acne and unwanted body hair
- decreases the risk of uterine cancer – the OCP prevents the lining of the uterus from building up, which happens when you don't have a period for a few months
- decreases the risk of ovarian and bowel cancer

### Is the OCP safe?

The OCP is one of the most researched and prescribed medications in the world. It is suitable for most healthy women and can be used long term.

### Are there any side effects?

The OCP may cause side effects like:

- irregular bleeding
- breast tenderness
- nausea

These side effects usually go away after a few months. In rare cases where these side effects don't go away, you should see your doctor.

### Are there any risks to using OCPs?

The birth control pill can increase your risk for blood clots. Blood clots are very rare but serious. This risk is greater if you smoke cigarettes. Get emergency help right away if you have:

- sudden severe headache, vision changes or loss of coordination
- weakness/numbness in arm or leg
- sudden difficulty breathing
- sharp pain in chest, groin or leg
- slurred speech

### The OCP does not cause:

- weight gain
- infertility

## How do I take the OCP?

- Take the pill at about the same time every day.
- If you forget to take a pill, follow the instructions on your pill container. Remember that the pill may not protect against pregnancy that month. You may also notice some bleeding.

## Other ways to take estrogen & progesterone

Estrogen & progesterone are also available in a:

- skin patch (like a Band-Aid®) you change weekly
- vaginal ring (inserted like a tampon) that you change once each month

## Progesterone only treatments

If your doctors feel that the birth control pill is not right for you, they may prescribe a progesterone only treatment. This may be in the form of either Provera® tablets, Depo-Provera® injections, or the Mirena® intra-uterine system.

## Anti-androgens

Your doctor may prescribe anti-androgens if methods to remove unwanted hair aren't working well. Anti-androgens decrease the effects of androgens in the body, but they can take six-12 months to work. Your doctor will decide which medication is the best one for you. Anti-androgens should never be taken during pregnancy, as they are harmful to an unborn baby. If you are sexually active, you must use a reliable form of birth control.

**Cyproterone acetate** (Androcur®) lowers the levels of androgens in the body. It is available alone or combined with the birth control pill (Diane – 35®). Your doctor may want you to have a blood test before you start this drug, and regularly during treatment. Side effects may include tiredness and headache. The tiredness usually goes away within three months.

**Spirolactone** (Aldactone®) is commonly used to treat unwanted hair growth. It may cause fatigue and high levels of potassium in the blood at higher doses. You should not take potassium supplements if you are taking spironolactone or if you have kidney disease. Regular check-ups and blood tests are important while taking spironolactone.

Other anti-androgen medications are also available. Your doctor will prescribe them if they are better suited to you.

## Insulin Sensitizers (Metformin®)

These medications decrease insulin resistance and lower insulin levels (and then androgen levels). This may be a good option if you also have higher blood sugar levels. Regular check ups and blood tests are important while taking Metformin®.

### Metformin®

- may help to regulate periods and control unwanted body hair after several months of treatment
- may help to prevent women with pre-diabetes from developing diabetes

### Possible side effects

- upset stomach (nausea)
- diarrhea
- unpleasant metallic taste in the mouth

Starting at a low dose and taking metformin with food can reduce side effects. Side effects usually go away after the first week. Please call your doctor if they don't.