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DIETITIAN'S DISH

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER BROUGHT TO YOU BY:
YOUR MGH WEIGHT CENTER REGISTERED DIETITIANS



UNDERSTANDING POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME (PCOS)

NUTRITION TIPS
HORMONE HEALTH
MATCHING MOVEMENT TO YOUR CYCLE
BUILDING HEALTHY HABITS

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) and Your Health

Did you know PCOS is one of the most common health conditions for folks with ovaries? It happens when hormone levels get out of balance, which can cause irregular periods, trouble getting pregnant, acne, or extra hair growth.

People with PCOS often have many small egg sacs in their ovaries, making it harder to release eggs regularly. Some body chemicals that help control blood sugar don't work as well, making it tougher for insulin to do its job. This can affect weight, energy, and overall health. Managing PCOS involves improving the body's use of insulin and bringing hormone levels into balance.

Tips to Help Manage PCOS

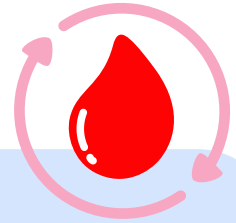
- **Eat regular, balanced meals.** Include protein (like eggs, chicken, or beans) and fiber (like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains).
- **Move daily.** Walking, dancing, or any activity you enjoy can make a difference.
- **Get good sleep.** Try to sleep 7 to 9 hours each night. Turn off screens before bed, keep your room cool, and follow a relaxing bedtime routine.
- **Lower stress.** Breathing exercises, stretching, yoga, or quiet time can help you feel calmer.
- **Losing a little weight** - about 5–10% of your body weight) may help improve fertility and reduce health risks over time.



Shele, G., et al. (2020). A systematic review of the effects of exercise on hormones in women with PCOS. *PMC*, PMC7739243.

Zhao, H., et al. (2023). Association of insulin resistance and elevated androgen levels with polycystic ovarian syndrome: A review of literature. *BMC Ovarian Research*.

Nutrition & Hormones



Menstrual Phase (Days ~1–5)

- **What's happening:** This is when your period happens. The uterus lining sheds because pregnancy didn't occur.
- **Hormones:**
 - **Estrogen:** low → normally boosts mood, energy, and rebuilds the uterine lining, but here it's at rest.
 - **Progesterone:** low → usually calms and prepares the uterus, but here it drops to trigger bleeding.
 - **FSH (Follicle Stimulating Hormone):** starting to rise → signals ovaries to prepare new eggs.

How you might feel: Low energy, cramps, wanting rest and comfort. It's a good time to slow down and reflect.

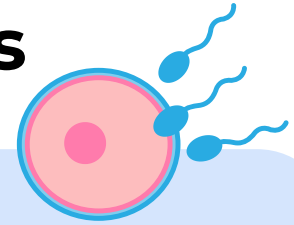


Follicular Phase (Days ~6–14)

- **What's happening:** The body grows new follicles (eggs). The uterine lining starts to rebuild.
- **Hormones:**
 - **Estrogen:** rising → boosts mood, focus, energy, and helps thicken uterine lining.
 - **FSH:** stimulates egg growth in the ovaries.
 - **LH (Luteinizing Hormone):** slowly rising → preparing to trigger ovulation.

How you might feel: Motivation and energy increase. Many feel more social, confident, and creative. It's a great time for learning or starting new projects.

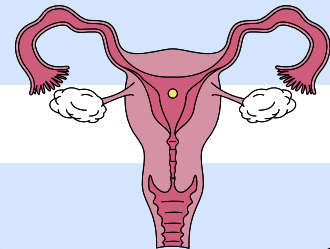
Nutrition & Hormones



Ovulation Phase (Days ~14–16)

- **What's happening:** The egg is released. This is the fertile window.
- **Hormones:**
 - **Estrogen:** peaks → highest energy, glowing skin, strong libido, brain sharpness.
 - **Progesterone:** starts rising → balances mood and preps the uterus for possible pregnancy.
 - **LH:** big surge → main trigger for egg release.

How you might feel: Outgoing, magnetic, naturally more confident. Body temperature rises slightly. A great time for connection and communication.



Luteal Phase (Days ~15–28)

- **What's happening:** The body prepares for pregnancy. If no fertilization, hormones drop and the cycle restarts.
- **Hormones:**
 - **Progesterone:** high → calms the nervous system, increases body temp, supports uterine lining (but can also cause bloating or sleepiness).
 - **Estrogen:** dips, then rises a bit, then falls → changes can cause PMS mood swings.
- **How you might feel:** Week 1 of luteal: Feeling stable, productive, and focused. Week 2 of luteal: Tiredness, sensitivity, cravings, and mood swings may increase.

Nutrition & Hormones:

Matching Foods to Your Cycle

Your hormones change throughout the menstrual cycle, and what you eat can help support them. The cycle has four phases: menstrual, follicular, ovulatory, and luteal.

Menstrual Phase (Days 1–5)

- **Hormones:** Estrogen and progesterone are low.
- **Nutrition:** Eat iron-rich foods like spinach, beans, and lentils. Choose easy-to-digest foods.
- **Tip for PCOS:** Anti-inflammatory foods may reduce cramps and fatigue.



Follicular Phase (Days 6–14)

- **Hormones:** Estrogen rises, LH and FSH start to increase.
- **Nutrition:** Eat flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds, leafy greens, and whole grains to support estrogen and insulin balance.
- **Tip for PCOS:** Fiber-rich foods help with insulin sensitivity.



Gautam, R. (2025). The role of lifestyle interventions in PCOS management. *Systematic Review*.

Wang, F., et al. (2024). Effects of high-protein diets on cardiometabolic factors in women with PCOS. *Nutrition & Diabetes*.

Ansari, J., Imran, M., & Khan, G. (2023). Effect of seed cycling diet on hormonal levels in polycystic ovarian syndrome patients. *Food Science & Nutrition*.

Nutrition & Hormones:

Matching Foods to Your Cycle

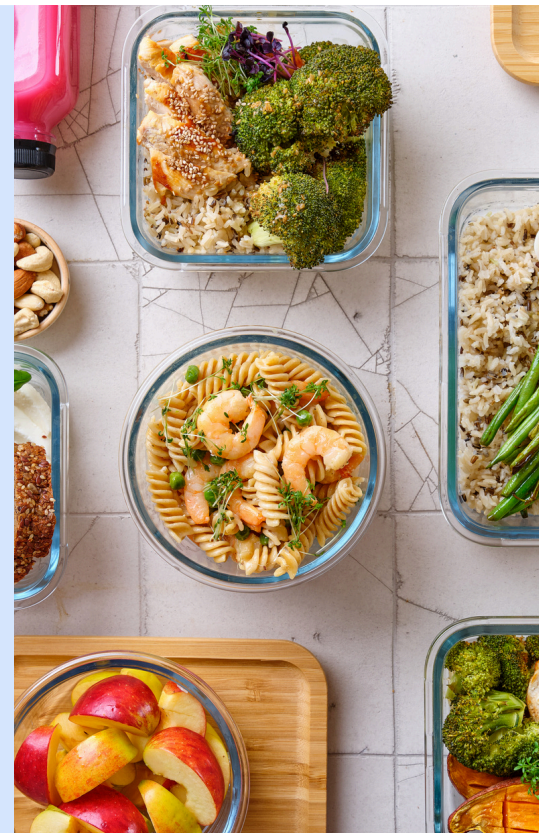
Ovulatory Phase (Days 15–17)

- **Hormones:** Estrogen peaks, LH spikes, and ovulation occurs.
- **Nutrition:** Vitamin C-rich foods (citrus, bell peppers) and omega-3 sources (salmon, walnuts) help support egg release.
- **Tip for PCOS:** Include protein at each meal to stabilize blood sugar and reduce androgen spikes.



Luteal Phase (Days 18–28)

- **Hormones:** Progesterone rises, estrogen dips.
- **Nutrition:** Magnesium and vitamin B6 foods (bananas, sweet potatoes, leafy greens) support progesterone. Avoid high-sugar foods.
- **Tip for PCOS:** Balanced meals with protein, fiber, and healthy fats can steady blood sugar, ease PMS symptoms, and curb cravings.



Gautam, R. (2025). The role of lifestyle interventions in PCOS management. *Systematic Review*.

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General PCOS-Friendly Foods

Eating the right foods helps manage hormones and improve fertility:

- **Fiber and vitamins** – Vegetables and Fruits
- **Whole grains** – Oats, Brown rice, Quinoa
- **Lean proteins** – Eggs, Chicken, Turkey, Beans
- **Healthy fats** – Olive oil, Nuts, Seeds



Seed cycling may support hormone balance and weight, but research is still early. It involves eating specific seeds during different cycle phases to help nourish the body.

- Flax/Pumpkin seeds during the first half of the cycle (days 1-14)
- Sesame/Sunflower seeds during the second (days 15-28)



Gautam, R. (2025). The role of lifestyle interventions in PCOS management. *Systematic Review*.

Ansari, J., Imran, M., & Khan, G. (2023). Effect of seed cycling diet on hormonal levels in polycystic ovarian syndrome patients. *Food Science & Nutrition*.

Exercise & Hormones:

Matching Movement to Your Cycle

Exercise helps balance hormones in PCOS. Different cycle phases may call for different activities, but aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week.



Menstrual Phase (Days 1–5)

- **Hormones:** Low estrogen and progesterone.
- **Exercise:** Gentle movement like walking, yoga, or stretching.

Follicular Phase (Days 6–14)

- **Hormones:** Rising estrogen, LH, and FSH.
- **Exercise:** Moderate-intensity workouts like cycling, swimming, or light strength training.



Ovulatory Phase (Days 15–17)

- **Hormones:** Estrogen peaks, LH triggers ovulation.
- **Exercise:** High-intensity workouts like interval training or lifting heavier weights.

Luteal Phase (Days 18–28)

- **Hormones:** Progesterone rises, estrogen dips.
- **Exercise:** Moderate-intensity activities like Pilates, brisk walking, or lighter strength training.



Shele, G., et al. (2020). A systematic review of the effects of exercise on hormones in women with PCOS. *PMC*.

Sabag, A. (2024). Exercise in the management of polycystic ovary syndrome. *Journal of Science & Direct*.

Gautam, R. (2025). The role of lifestyle interventions in PCOS management. *Systematic Review*.

Motaharinezhad, F., et al. (2024). The effects of different exercises on weight loss and hormonal health in women with PCOS. *BMC Women's Health*.

Butt, M. S., et al. (2023). Benefits of physical activity on reproductive health in PCOS. *BMC Public Health*.

Lifestyle & Weight Management in PCOS

Eating well, staying active, and using behavior strategies can:

- Improve **hormone balance**
- Boost **insulin sensitivity**
- Support **fertility**



Behavioral Strategies

- **Set SMART goals:** *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound*
 - Example: “I will walk 20 minutes, 5 days per week.”
- **Track progress** with a journal or app → keeps you accountable.
- **Plan meals ahead** and keep healthy snacks on hand (nuts, fruit, hummus + veggies).
- **Practice mindful eating:**
 - Eat slowly
 - Notice hunger/fullness cues
 - Reduce emotional eating



Sleep & Stress

- **Sleep:** Aim for 7–9 hours/night
 - Poor sleep increases insulin resistance + cravings.
- **Stress:** Find ways to relax and recharge as high stress can worsen PCOS symptoms.
 - Meditation
 - Breathing exercises
 - Time outdoors



Menstrual Phase Meal Plan

Breakfast

Oatmeal Bowl

- In a pot, simmer rolled oats in your choice of milk
- Stewed apples or pears
- Add Cinnamon + Nutmeg
- Mix in protein powder or top with greek yogurt
- Optional: walnuts or pumpkin seeds



Lunch

Red Lentil & Carrot Soup

- Sauté onion, carrot, and celery in olive oil until softened
- Add red lentils, turmeric, black pepper, and vegetable broth
- Simmer until lentils are soft (about 20 minutes)
- Stir in spinach at the end and serve with warm sourdough or whole-grain bread



Snack

Cacao Protein Elixir + Energy Bites

- Drink: Warm almond milk blended with raw cacao powder, a scoop of protein powder (plant or whey), a pinch of cinnamon, and a little honey or maple syrup
- Bites: Blend oats, almond butter, chia seeds, cacao nibs, and a drizzle of honey; roll into small balls and refrigerate. These provide steady energy, magnesium, and protein.



Dinner

Seared Steak with Root Vegetables

- Toss chopped sweet potato, parsnip, and beets with olive oil, garlic, rosemary, and a pinch of salt; roast at 400°F until tender (about 30–35 minutes)
- Season lean steak with salt, pepper, and herbs; sear 3–5 min per side; let rest before slicing
- Sauté kale or Swiss chard in olive oil with garlic until wilted.



Follicular Phase Meal Plan

Breakfast

Greek Yogurt Parfait with Seeds & Berries

- Layer Greek yogurt with mixed berries (blueberries, raspberries, strawberries)
- Add a sprinkle of ground flaxseeds + pumpkin seeds (support estrogen balance and provide fiber)
- Drizzle lightly with honey, top with a spoonful of oats for crunch



Lunch

Quinoa Salad with Chickpeas & Greens

- Cook quinoa and let cool slightly
- Mix with chickpeas, chopped cucumber, cherry tomatoes, parsley, and baby spinach
- Dress with olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and a pinch of cumin
- Optional: crumble in a little feta cheese



Snack

Warm Veggie Sticks with Hummus

- Lightly steam or roast carrot and zucchini sticks until tender but still slightly firm
- Serve with 3–4 tablespoons of hummus for protein and healthy fats
- Optional: sprinkle with paprika or cumin for flavor
- Add a few roasted chickpeas on the side for extra protein if desired



Dinner

Grilled Chicken with Asparagus & Wild Rice

- Season chicken breast with olive oil, garlic, and fresh herbs (thyme, oregano) and grill or pan-sear
- Roast asparagus with olive oil, lemon zest, and black pepper
- Serve with wild rice (fiber-rich for insulin support)
- Add a small side salad of arugula with olive oil + balsamic



Ovulatory Phase Meal Plan

Breakfast

Berry & Spinach Smoothie Bowl

- Blend frozen berries (blueberries, raspberries), a handful of spinach, 1 scoop of protein powder, and unsweetened almond milk
- Pour into a bowl and top with sliced banana, chia seeds, and a few crushed almonds for crunch and minerals



Lunch

Grilled Salmon Salad

- Grill salmon fillet with lemon and fresh herbs (dill, parsley)
- Serve on a bed of mixed greens, cucumber, cherry tomatoes, and shredded carrots
- Dress with olive oil, lemon juice, and a pinch of black pepper



Snack

Cottage Cheese & Berry Bowl

- Combine ½ cup cottage cheese with fresh berries (strawberries, blueberries, or raspberries)
- Sprinkle with pumpkin seeds or slivered almonds for protein, magnesium, and healthy fats
- Optional: drizzle a small amount of honey for sweetness



Dinner

Zucchini Noodles with Shrimp & Pesto

- Spiralize zucchini into noodles
- Sauté shrimp with garlic and olive oil
- Toss with a light homemade pesto (basil, olive oil, pine nuts)
- Optional: sprinkle with parmesan or nutritional yeast for flavor
- Serve with a side of roasted bell peppers or a fresh cucumber salad



Luteal Phase Meal Plan

Breakfast

Scrambled Eggs with Spinach and Sweet Potato

- Sauté diced sweet potato in olive oil until tender
- Add a handful of spinach and lightly scramble with 2–3 eggs
- Season with salt, pepper, and a pinch of paprika



Lunch

Turkey & Roasted Vegetable Bowl

- Roast diced zucchini, carrots, and bell peppers with olive oil and herbs at 400°F for 20–25 minutes
- Serve with sliced roasted turkey breast
- Optional: drizzle with olive oil or tahini for healthy fats



Snack

Apple Slices with Almond Butter and Pumpkin Seeds

- Slice 1 apple and top with 1–2 tbsp almond butter and a sprinkle of pumpkin seeds



Dinner

Navy Bean Vegetable Stew

- Sauté onion, garlic, carrots in olive oil until soft
- Add cooked beans, kidney beans, diced tomatoes, chopped kale
- Simmer for 20–25 minutes with herbs (rosemary, thyme) and a pinch of salt and pepper

