

Meta Description: What is Adrenal PCOS? - its causes, signs, and treatments. Understand the importance of personalized treatment plans to achieve health and fertility.

What is Adrenal PCOS? - Causes, Signs, and Treatments

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a complex endocrine disorder that [affects 4–20% of women](#) of reproductive age and represents the most common endocrine problem in this patient population.

Within the broad spectrum of PCOS, there exists a specific subtype known as Adrenal PCOS, characterized by the influence of adrenal gland dysfunction on hormonal imbalances.

In this blog, we will consider the causes, signs, and treatments of adrenal PCOS, offering valuable insights to help women with the knowledge necessary for improved health and fertility.

Table of Contents

[What is Adrenal PCOS? - Causes, Signs, and Treatments](#)

[Understanding Adrenal PCOS](#)

[The Role Of DHEA-S](#)

[How to Test For Adrenal PCOS](#)

[Causes of Adrenal PCOS](#)

[Hormonal Imbalances](#)

[Chronic Stress](#)

[Insulin Resistance](#)

[Signs of Adrenal PCOS](#)

[Irregular Menstrual Cycles](#)

[Hyperandrogenism](#)

[Insulin Resistance](#)

[Chronic Fatigue](#)

[Fertility Issues](#)

[Treatments for Adrenal PCOS](#)

[Lifestyle Modifications](#)

[Balanced Nutrition](#)

[Supplements](#)

[Fertility Interventions](#)

[Get Help For Adrenal PCOS](#)

Understanding Adrenal PCOS

PCOS is a common endocrine disorder affecting women of reproductive age, and it is identified by hormonal imbalances that contribute to a range of symptoms affecting the ovaries and other parts of the body.

Adrenal PCOS, short for Adrenal Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, is a specific subtype of PCOS with unique characteristics rooted in the dysfunction of the adrenal glands. This is in contrast to other types of PCOS, where the ovaries themselves produce excessive androgens.

The [adrenal glands](#), triangular-shaped organs on top of each kidney, are crucial in producing various hormones, including cortisol and androgens.

In Adrenal PCOS, there is an abnormality in the functioning of these adrenal glands, leading to an overproduction of androgens, particularly DHEA-S (dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate), which are male sex hormones. This excess androgen production contributes to the development of PCOS symptoms. You might see a normal level of testosterone but elevated DHEA-S level.

The Role Of DHEA-S

The primary androgen involved in Adrenal PCOS is DHEA-S (dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate). Dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate, commonly known as DHEA-S, is a steroid hormone produced by the adrenal glands situated on top of each kidney.

DHEA-S is a sulfated form of DHEA, and it serves as a precursor to various sex hormones, such as estrogen and testosterone. This hormone helps maintain hormonal balance within the body.

In conditions like Adrenal Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (Adrenal PCOS), the overproduction of DHEA-S from the adrenal glands can contribute to hormonal imbalances, particularly an excess of androgens.

Elevated levels of DHEA-S are associated with symptoms such as acne, irregular menstruation, hirsutism (excessive hair growth), and other manifestations of hyperandrogenism.

Understanding the role of DHEA-S is essential in comprehending the hormonal dynamics in conditions like PCOS and guides the development of targeted therapeutic strategies to manage associated symptoms.

How to Test For Adrenal PCOS

Diagnosing Adrenal Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (Adrenal PCOS) involves a comprehensive approach, including a combination of:

- Medical history assessment
- Physical examinations

- Specific laboratory tests

To evaluate adrenal function and its impact on hormonal balance, healthcare professionals may order blood tests to measure levels of hormones such as dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate (DHEA-S), cortisol, and androgens.

Elevated levels of DHEA-S, a key androgen produced by the adrenal glands, may indicate adrenal dysfunction contributing to PCOS symptoms. Additionally, cortisol levels may be assessed, as chronic stress and adrenal dysfunction are often interlinked.

Imaging studies such as ultrasounds may also be performed to examine the ovaries for cysts or other abnormalities. As Adrenal PCOS is a subtype of PCOS, the diagnostic process often considers a range of symptoms, medical history, and laboratory findings to differentiate it from other forms of PCOS and hormonal disorders.

Seeking guidance from healthcare professionals, including endocrinologists and reproductive specialists, is important for an accurate diagnosis and developing a treatment plan tailored to individual needs.

Causes of Adrenal PCOS

Hormonal Imbalances

The primary cause of Adrenal PCOS lies in the adrenal glands' overproduction of androgens, particularly DHEA-S (dehydroepiandrosterone sulfate). This excess androgen production can contribute to the development of cysts on the ovaries, resulting in the characteristic symptoms of PCOS.

Chronic Stress

Stress is a significant factor in Adrenal PCOS. The adrenal glands release cortisol, the stress hormone, in response to chronic stress. Elevated cortisol levels can offset the balance of sex hormones, leading to irregular menstrual cycles, fertility issues, and the manifestation of PCOS symptoms.

Insulin Resistance

Insulin resistance, a common feature in traditional PCOS, is also associated with Adrenal PCOS. The body's inability to effectively respond to insulin can lead to elevated insulin levels, triggering increased androgen production by the adrenal glands.

Signs of Adrenal PCOS

Identifying the signs of Adrenal PCOS is crucial for timely intervention and management. While symptoms may vary from person to person, the following are common indicators:

Irregular Menstrual Cycles

Adrenal PCOS often manifests with irregular or absent menstrual cycles due to hormonal imbalances affecting the ovaries.

Hyperandrogenism

High levels of androgens can lead to symptoms such as:

- Deepening of voice
- Hirsutism (excessive hair growth)
- Acne
- Male-pattern baldness.

Insulin Resistance

Similar to traditional PCOS, women with Adrenal PCOS may experience insulin resistance, leading to weight gain, particularly around the abdominal area.

Chronic Fatigue

Adrenal gland dysfunction can result in chronic fatigue as the body copes with prolonged exposure to stress and hormonal imbalances. You could experience poor sleep quality, brain fog, tiredness after a restful night, etc.

Fertility Issues

Adrenal PCOS can impact fertility by disrupting ovulation. Women may face challenges in conceiving and may require specialized fertility interventions.

Treatments for Adrenal PCOS

Lifestyle Modifications

Implementing lifestyle changes is crucial in managing Adrenal PCOS. Stress reduction techniques such as self-care, meditation, yoga, and healthy sleep patterns can help regulate cortisol levels and improve overall hormonal balance.

Balanced Nutrition

A well-balanced diet focused on whole foods can support hormonal health. Managing insulin levels through a diet rich in whole grains, fiber, healthy fats, and lean proteins can help alleviate symptoms associated with Adrenal PCOS.

Working with a [registered dietitian](#) specializing in helping women with PCOS can create a personalized meal plan with Adrenal PCOS-friendly meals!

Supplements

Certain supplements may aid in regulating hormonal imbalances. Consulting with a healthcare professional is helpful in determining individual needs. Supplements such as berberine, [omega-3 fatty acids](#), [vitamin D](#), ashwagandha, magnesium and inositol have shown promise in managing PCOS symptoms.

Fertility Interventions

For women struggling with fertility due to Adrenal PCOS, fertility interventions such as ovulation induction or in vitro fertilization (IVF) may be used to boost chances to conceive. Consultation with a [fertility specialist](#) can help individuals explore personalized options.

Get Help For Adrenal PCOS

In conclusion, understanding Adrenal PCOS is vital for women seeking to address the unique challenges posed by this variant of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome. Recognizing the causes, signs, and available treatments helps to take proactive steps toward better health and fertility.

As a Registered Dietitian and Certified Fertility and Prenatal Dietitian, I am here to support you on your journey. If you are experiencing symptoms of Adrenal PCOS, consider [scheduling a consultation](#) to explore personalized strategies to achieve your health and fertility goals.

Together, we can navigate the path toward optimal well-being.