Foods to Include and Avoid in a PCOS Diet – Important Nutrition Facts
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Before knowing the important foods that should be included in the PCOS diet menu, it is necessary to know what PCOS is. PCOS is the abbreviated form of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, also known as the Stein-Leventhal Syndrome. It is one of the most prevalent hormonal endocrine disorders among women, and it affects 1 in 10 women who are at their child-bearing age. It is difficult to diagnose PCOS with just a single test and the symptoms vary from woman to woman. But an early diagnosis of PCOS is important because it increases the risk of other chronic medical conditions and health issues such as insulin resistance, Type 2 Diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol level and heart disease.

Comprehensive List of Foods to Include and Avoid in a PCOS Diet

Important Nutrition Facts

Obesity and weight gain is a common symptom of PCOS. In this condition, several cysts appear in the ovaries, and they form a pattern like a string of pearls. Women with PCOS may also have high testosterone levels that lead to excessive hair growth, male pattern baldness, and acne and irregular menstrual cycle because the testosterone prevents the ovaries from releasing the egg every month. PCOS is one of the ruling causes of infertility in women, and it comprises 70% of the infertility issues. A well-planned Low GI weight loss diet and regular exercise and physical activity are the best solutions to the question of how to overcome obesity and control PCOS problems and symptoms.

Relation between Insulin and PCOS

There is a close connection between insulin and PCOS. The insulin hormone is released by the beta cells of the pancreas and it helps to transport sugar from blood to the muscles where the sugar is used as energy right then or are stored in the form of fats for future use. But high insulin levels can wreak havoc on the body leading to PCOS symptoms such as sudden unexplained weight gain,
increased hair growth, fatty liver, high cholesterol, skin tags, polycystic ovaries and irregular menstrual cycle along with increase hunger and craving.

Management of insulin levels in the blood is crucial for management of PCOS and it can be done in an effective manner by following a healthy Low GI (Glycemic Index) Diet which comprises whole grains and unprocessed foods.

What Is PCOS Diet?

PCOS (Polycystic Ovary Syndrome) is a hormonal disorder among women that is caused mainly due to insulin resistance or endocrine dysfunction, and one of the most common side-effects of this health condition is uncontrolled weight gain. But a typical “Low-Fat” weight loss diet like the simple 1200 calorie diet plan is not effective enough to promote weight loss in women suffering from PCOS because in this case, weight gain is a result of high insulin levels that promotes fat storage in the body. Polycystic ovaries treatment and weight management call for a specialized Low GI Diet that includes selected combinations of foods that don’t cause a rapid rise in blood glucose levels.

6 Healthy Food Groups to Include in a PCOS Diet Menu

The following is a healthy PCOS food list that can be included in the daily diet in order to manage the polycystic ovarian disease in a more effective manner and prevent weight gain which is one of the most recognizable symptoms of this condition.

Green Leafy Vegetables

The benefits of eating fruits and vegetables to lose weight are well known, but it also helps to control Polycystic Ovary Syndrome naturally. Leafy vegetables have maximum nutrients per calories compared to other foods and also rich in calcium, iron, potassium, magnesium along with vitamins K, C and E and most importantly essential B vitamins which plays an imperative role in managing the symptoms of PCOS. B vitamins – especially B2, B3, B5 and B6 help in better sugar and fat metabolism, improve thyroid functioning and render better hormone balance, improve fertility all of which are essential for PCOS management.
The minerals help to neutralize the acidity caused by inflammation and impaired glucose tolerance. Calcium helps in egg maturation and follicle development in ovaries; potassium is needed for FSH (Follicle Stimulation Hormone) production. It helps to reduce PMS symptoms and also promotes weight loss.

Coloured Vegetables

Brightly colored vegetables not only makes for an appetizing salad but also helps in controlling PCOS and must be included in the PCOS diet plan. Colourful vegetables are loaded with powerful antioxidants that help to neutralize the harmful effects of oxidative stress in women suffering from PCOS.

Some of the healthiest colored vegetables include red and yellow bell peppers, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, carrots, eggplant, etc.
Fruits

This is the next set of healthy foods that must be included in PCOS diet recipes. Although most women suffering from PCOS are reluctant to include fruits in their diet because of the fructose content that causes a sudden spike in blood sugar levels and consequently insulin levels, fruits are really rich in phytonutrients, vitamins, minerals and fibres so it should not be avoided entirely.

Include fruits that have low GI such as lime, strawberries, apricot, grapefruit, lemon, cantaloupe, guava, pear, oranges, watermelon, blueberries, nectarines, apples and kiwifruit and also eat a handful of nuts or seeds with the fruits for the much needed protein boost that helps to control the sudden sugar spike caused by fruits. You can also try delicious kiwi smoothie recipes which are loaded with nutrients.

Healthy Fats

Not all fats are unhealthy and harmful for women suffering from PCOS. Healthy fats and essential fatty acids are indispensable for maintaining the cells and removing toxins from the body as well as promoting hormonal balance and weight management. Healthy fats also hold an important place in PCOS fertility diet. Healthy fats are found in seeds, nuts, avocado, olive oil and oily fishes like tuna and salmon.
We are well aware of the used of olive oil for body and overall health, but oily fishes are not far behind. Salmon is an amazing source of healthy fats and vitamin D that helps relieve certain problems related to PCOS. Tuna is rich in B vitamins and vitamin D both of which are essential for women with PCOS.

**Organic Meat**

Because weight gain is a major issue related to PCOS, it is important to include lean proteins in a PCOS weight loss diet in order to control body weight.
Meat is one of the powerful natural sources of protein. But you must opt for organic lean cuts of meat that contain fewer hormones and pesticides and are not genetically modified.

Low GI Carbohydrates

It is not necessary to completely shun carbohydrates even if you have PCOS, you just need to choose the carbohydrates judiciously. Carbohydrates with high Glycemic Index such as instant breakfast cereals, white breads, white bagels and white rice cause fast rise and blood sugar levels which in turn increase the release of insulin from the pancreas in order to use the glucose for energy, but high levels of insulin in the body eventually leads to insulin resistance and obesity which worsens PCOS symptoms.

![Image of legumes and beans]

Therefore, it is suggested to opt for healthy carbohydrates with low Glycemic Index that takes longer to break down and digest, causing slow and consistent release of blood glucose in the body. Low GI foods also aid to keep you satiated for longer and prevent cravings. Most legumes, beans, and lentils and non-starchy vegetables have low GI rating.

7 Foods Groups to Avoid in a PCOS Diet Menu

Healthy polycystic ovaries diet recipes should exclude foods from these 7 food groups because they usually affect the insulin level in the body and worsen the polycystic ovary symptoms.

High GI Foods

As already discussed before, foods that have high Glycemic Index promote a sudden rise in blood sugar level which in turn lead to increased release of insulin which work to regulate the glucose released into the bloodstream. Although high GI Foods are tasty and good to eat, they are also high in calories and lacking in nutrients which make them unhealthy.
Some of the unhealthy high GI foods that we consume every day are biscuits, cakes, white bread, pies, rolls, white pasta, white rice, most breakfast cereals, dried fruits, soda, candy, flavoured yogurt, ice creams, fruit juices and packaged soups. A diet rich in sugar and simple carbohydrates is directly linked to PCOS; sugars not only affect the insulin levels but also disrupt ovulation.

Dairy Products

Although dairy products and milk are an essential part of a balanced diet chart, they can be harmful in case of PCOS. Therefore, this healthy food also comes under the list of foods to avoid with PCOS.

Consumption of milk can increase testosterone levels and a particular type of protein in milk also limits regular processing of testosterone in the body which causes the testosterone levels to keep rising without any barrier and it only makes the PCOS symptoms worse. Therefore, it is best to avoid milk, cheese, yogurt, butter and other milk products as much as possible.
Soy Products

Most intolerant individuals or those who avoid dairy products immediately turn to soy as a healthy substitute. But this can’t be done in the case of PCOS. It has been found that soy is implicated in delayed ovulation which can make things worse for women with PCOS.

So, it is best for women with PCOS to avoid soy products and exclude it especially from the PCOS pregnancy diet if they are trying to conceive.

Unhealthy Fats

The next food group that should be strictly excluded from the polycystic ovary syndrome diet is unhealthy fats such as saturated fats, hydrogenated fats and trans fats that aggravate the problems of PCOS. Saturated fats are present in fatty cuts of red meat and dairy products, and it causes an increase in production of oestrogen which hinders the absorption of certain nutrients in the body and promotes weight gain.
Trans fats and hydrogenated fats found in cooking oil, processed foods and margarine increase the risk of heart disease and diabetes mellitus in women with PCOS.

Caffeine

We are already aware of the numerous coffee disadvantages, and it has been seen that excessive consumption of coffee (4 or more cups a day) can also affect fertility in women. Because PCOS already has a direct impact on fertility, coffee can make things worse.
Daily intake of coffee increases the levels of estradiol, a type of oestrogen hormone which affects ovulation and menstrual cycle. You can definitely cut down or eliminate caffeine from your diet to see if it lessens the PCOS symptoms and improves fertility.

**Alcohol**

It is well known that alcohol consumption increase the risk of PCOS in women by almost 50% compared to those who don’t drink alcohol. The liver is the key organ that eliminates excess oestrogen from the body, but regular alcohol consumption puts excess pressure on the liver where flushing out the alcohol becomes its prime objective, and the task of removing oestrogen is pushed to the background which creates an oestrogen dominant environment in the body.

In addition, alcohol is readily converted into sugar in the body which contributes to insulin resistance and impaired glucose tolerance. The acidity created by alcohol aggravates inflammation and makes things worse both for people with Type 2 Diabetes and PCOS.

**Processed Foods**

Last but not the least are processed foods, which have a great impact on PCOS. The additives, chemicals, flavors and preservatives present in processed foods boost the release of prostaglandins hormone which trigger inflammation which in turn increases levels of insulin in the body.
Eat whole foods instead that are in their natural form.

Important Guidelines to Improve Insulin Sensitivity and Control PCOS

Although there is no known cure for PCOS yet, following a few simple guidelines and bringing about a few changes in the lifestyle can help a lot in managing PCOS symptoms naturally.

- Consume whole grains instead of processed and refined foods and whole fruits instead of fruit juices in order to maintain blood glucose and insulin levels.
- Eating foods rich in fiber also lead to a slower, consistent and controlled rise in blood sugar and insulin levels.

- Some healthy fiber rich foods are legumes and vegetables that also provide necessary nutrients for the body.
- Combine proteins and carbohydrates together because proteins help to regulate the blood glucose spike caused by carbohydrates consumption.

- Eat regularly but not too frequently. Divide your foods into 3 to 4 meals and eat them every 4 to 5 hours in order to improve insulin sensitivity and prevent cravings for unhealthy snacks. Also, never ever skip breakfast.

- Limit salt intake to less than 2400 milligrams per day. Use other seasonings such as lemon juice, vinegar, pepper, herbs, mustard and spices instead.

- Limit the intake of processed foods such as cured meats, smoked meats, salted nuts, canned vegetables, sauces, chips and marinades.

- Give up regular cooking oil and choose unsaturated oils such as olive oil and corn oil.

- Snack on healthy nuts and seeds such as almonds, walnuts, pecans, sunflower seeds and flax seeds that are rich in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats.

- Eat 2 to 3 servings of fish every week in order to load up on essential fatty acids that are beneficial for controlling PCOS symptoms.

- Choose healthy cooking options such as baking, grilling, broiling, boiling and steaming instead of deep frying.

- Eat protein with every meal because proteins have a stabilizing effect on sugar that is released by the carbohydrates.

- Avoid sugar in all forms – refined sugar, high fructose corn syrup and even artificial sweeteners.

- Drink 2 litres of water every day. You can add some tasty twist to your water by adding fresh cucumber, mint, berries or lemons to it.

- In order to promote healthy weight loss of 1 pound per week you can reduce 500 calories from your present maintenance calorie level and in order to reduce 2 pounds per week reduce 1000 calories from your daily maintenance calorie level.

- Women with PCOS are at much higher risk of heart diseases and diabetes, so it is best not to aggravate the risk further by smoking.

- Have enough sleep every night because a lack of sleep can affect hormones and worsen the symptoms and problems.

- Stay physically active and make exercise a part of your healthy lifestyle. Just like diet, exercise also plays a vital role in improving PCOS symptoms because it is a great way to enhance insulin sensitivity and restore the balance of the reproductive hormones. In addition, exercises also help in weight management and promoting weight loss.

- A combination of aerobic exercises for 30 minutes along with some strength training is the best option.
Keep a track of your periods and make it a point to consult your doctor if you are missing your periods consistently for several months or if there is a gap of more than 40 to 50 days between two periods. The absence of regular periods increases the risk of endometrial cancer.

So, now that you have a clear idea about the PCOS foods to eat and avoid for promoting effective PCOS management and controlling weight gain issues, plan out a low GI diet accordingly and lead a happy and healthy life without worries.

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