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Iodine and PCOS: What You Should Know



Iodine plays an essential role in the production of the thyroid hormone. Because the body does not make iodine naturally, it is essential to get adequate supplies from your diet. While iodine plays an important role with thyroid health, it also plays an important role in reducing polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) risk and severity.

Polycystic ovary syndrome is an endocrinological condition that can lead to a number of symptoms such as fertility concerns and in some cases can lead to the [development of cysts on the ovaries](#). The onset of PCOS can be due to several factors, including genetics, insulin resistance, and studies even find that an iodine deficiency may be part of the problem.

Iodine and its Functions

Normally, as blood levels of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) rise, the thyroid gland uses iodine to make necessary thyroid hormones. However, when the body is low in iodine, it can't produce enough. To compensate for the lower levels, the thyroid gland works harder to force more production which causes the cells to grow and multiply, eventually leading to a goiter.

Iodine is essential for hormone production in a woman's body. In addition to thyroid function, the ovaries contain the second highest iodine concentration in the body, behind the thyroid. Sustaining normal levels of iodine is essential for ovary health, and women with PCOS usually have low iodine levels.

Additionally, iodine deficiency negatively [effects folliculogenesis](#), the process in the maturation of the ovarian follicle into a fertilizable egg. This impact has been found to play a role in leading to PCOS onset.

When low iodine levels are present in women, thyroid activity becomes unbalanced and irregular. This lack of thyroid hormone production and release into the bloodstream is known as [hypothyroidism](#). In short, if the thyroid has low iodine, hormones aren't produced in proper amounts and when it comes to fertility, the ovaries can struggle.

Because of the exchanging role PCOS and hormones play on each other, it's common for women with PCOS to have higher incidences of thyroid disease or an enlarged thyroid or goiter.

How Hypothyroidism Aggravates PCOS

Hypothyroidism affects the ovaries similarly to polycystic ovary syndrome, causing ovary enlargement and cyst formation. [It can even worsen symptoms](#), and increase the risk for type 2 diabetes and insulin resistance.



Hypothyroidism may also increase testosterone [production](#) (male hormone) which can increase the risk of symptoms related to PCOS such as abnormal body or facial hair, male-pattern hair loss and acne.

Because of the potential for increased testosterone levels, women with PCOS should take care of iodine levels as too much testosterone may interfere with follicle development (the sacs where eggs develop in the ovaries) and averts regular ovulation (release of mature eggs).

Even though several factors cause PCOS, it is evident that getting sufficient iodine is among the significant steps to aid in treatment and prevention and some studies have found that iodine deficiency can lead to an increase in cyst formation in a woman's body. While iodine deficiency was a common problem in earlier years, in more recent years salt has been supplemented with iodine which can be attributed to the decrease in deficiency cases, however a risk of iodine deficiency is still possible. To avoid this risk, eating a [healthy diet of iodine-rich foods](#) and taking appropriate supplements when needed to acquire adequate nutrient amounts is essential.

The Impact of a PCOS Diet

As iodine deficiency, insulin resistance, and genetics are thought to be contributing factors with PCOS, women with the condition are advised to maintain a healthy body weight and stick to a low-sugar diet to [stabilize blood sugar](#). In addition, key dietary tips when balancing PCOS nutrition needs and symptoms includes incorporating a variety of vegetables, lean meats, whole grains, and legumes to prevent a spike in blood sugar levels and to stimulate insulin production.

Due to the role iodine plays with ovarian function, women with PCOS, or who are looking to improve fertility, should eat iodine-rich foods such as kelp and seaweed to maintain

sufficient iodine levels or take a nutritional supplement if levels are not being met with diet alone.

To help you approach PCOS nutrition, click here for [A 7-Day Sample PCOS Meal Plan](#)

Iodine-Related PCOS Complications and Prevention

While there is no finite research indicating an absolute connection between low iodine and PCOS, some women with PCOS find that iodine supplementation or iodine-rich dietary approaches help improve PCOS symptoms. Because low iodine levels can directly impact thyroid function, which regulates how the body converts food to energy (metabolism), and it assists in controlling the heart rate and influences fertility and menstrual cycle, the impact can have severe effects.

Furthermore, when the thyroid gland is working slowly, hypothyroidism can exacerbate PCOS symptoms and lead to uncommon symptoms, such as a slowed heart rate, an enlarged thyroid gland (goiter), and facial swelling.

Keeping a balanced production of TSH requires a number of things and correct iodine quantities is a top necessity. Too much or too little can worsen or lead to hypothyroidism and thyroid dysfunction.

Due to this, women with polycystic ovary syndrome should be extra cautious with their iodine intake, especially if they are at risk or have been diagnosed with hypothyroidism. Including sufficient amounts of iodine in the diet and preventing or correcting an iodine deficiency is essential and can not only impact overall health but can also help improve fertility and the chance of a successful conception.

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