

## Four Ways to Manage PCOS Without Dieting

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Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is an inflammatory health condition that affects how ovaries function. The current numbers suggest that around one in 10 people with ovaries have PCOS, however, this number is likely higher as many people live with PCOS symptoms but do not receive a diagnosis. The symptoms of [PCOS](#) range between people, including irregular periods or ovulation, growth of thick hair including facial hair, difficulty becoming pregnant, and alopecia (1).



### **Why weight loss is not a helpful recommendation**

The usual first-line approach given by medical professionals is weight loss, or weight maintenance to prevent weight gain. As a non-diet nutritionist, I will never prescribe you weight loss and actually, even if I were to, weight loss is not sustainable for the vast majority of people (2).

If you've been told to lose weight to manage PCOS, or if you've been told that your fertility will be affected by your body size; I'm really sorry that you've been made to feel bad about your body and have been victim to hurtful and unhelpful weight loss advice. And please know that there are many options for management of PCOS without having to diet, restrict, or show dislike to your body.

PCOS makes it extra challenging to lose weight due to the nature of the condition: hormonal factors that affect appetite, metabolism, energy levels, and people with PCOS are more

susceptible to stress and be more at risk of mental health conditions (3). Additionally, [eating disorders and disordered eating](#) are at a higher risk in people with PCOS than in the general population (4). If you have tried to diet to manage PCOS, which has left you in a cycle of hopping on and off diets, keep reading to read my top four starter tips to manage PCOS without dieting.

*“For now, know that you don’t need to stop eating carbs, you don’t need to chug down protein shakes, and you definitely don’t need to quit eating sugar.”*

I hope you’re still with me... before we continue to the tips, here is a summary up until now:

- PCOS is not your fault.
- Having PCOS does not mean you need to diet now or ever.
- People with PCOS are extra impacted by the stress of dieting, and may be at a higher risk of eating disorders and disordered eating.
- You don’t need to lose weight to manage your PCOS.

### **I’ve only ever been told to lose weight, what other options do I have?**

I’m so glad you asked! I am here to bring you my four top tips to start managing PCOS, without going on a diet:

#### **1. Eat regular meals and snacks**

This looks like eating at regular windows, and for most people, that means three meals and three snacks. Focus on eating regularly, and then once you’re ready, you can start focusing on adding foods in that can hopefully help with PCOS.

PCOS and foods for management cover a whole article on their own, but for now, know that you don't need to stop eating carbs, you don't need to chug down protein shakes, and you definitely don't need to quit eating sugar.

## **2. Work on your relationship with food**

This goes hand in hand with the above; if you are cautious to eat regularly (ideally every three to four hours), why do you think that is? Your relationship to food (i.e. how you think, behave and respond to food and eating) is really important to your overall health, and with PCOS, can have a huge impact on stress levels, disordered eating risk, and management of PCOS.

Here are a few things that someone with a not-so-positive relationship to food might experience, if any of these is you, please do reach out to arrange a complimentary call with me:

- Labelling foods as good/bad or healthy/unhealthy.
- Thinking some foods will cure you, and others will harm you.
- Using exercise as a way to earn food or feeling guilty when you haven't exercised.
- Putting off eating as far into the day as possible.
- Filling up with low-calorie foods, sodas, or tea/coffee.
- Feeling like you never stop thinking about food.
- Hopping on and off of diets.
- Trying to change your body through diets or 'just eating healthy'.



## **3. Get the basics of stress-management down**

If you have PCOS, you've probably been told to 'manage your [stress levels](#)' because stress can worsen symptoms, but actually dieting increases stress levels

(3). Here are three stress management activities to try out today:

- Daily brain dumps, in the morning, after work, or straight before bed. Start with one, then add in other times if this is helpful.
- Meditation and mindfulness.
- Take some time for yourself every day; this might be lying down for five minutes, taking a hot shower or bath, making a hot drink and reading a book, or watching a random YouTube video.

#### **4. Put the breaks on nutrition for now**

And work with a professional when you're ready. This is a really big one, and it might be frustrating to read. But, trying to manage your PCOS without eating regular meals, working on your relationship to food, and building up your stress management techniques is probably going to leave you feeling overwhelmed. Give yourself permission to put nutrition on the back burner: once you've worked on the other three things, you can come back to it.

#### References

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4. Pirotta, S. et al. (2019) Disordered eating behaviours and eating disorders in women in Australia with and without PCOS: A cross-sectional study. *J Clin Med*; 8(10): 1682.