

OVARIAN CONDITIONS

There are conditions linked to the ovaries that mean the menstrual cycle and menstrual health are disrupted.

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a common condition that affects how ovaries work. The 3 main features of PCOS are:

- irregular periods – which means your ovaries do not regularly release eggs (ovulation)
- excess androgen – physical signs such as excess facial or body hair
- polycystic ovaries – ovaries become enlarged and contain many fluid-filled sacs (follicles) that surround the eggs (but despite the name, you do not actually have cysts if you have PCOS)

If you have signs and symptoms of PCOS, they'll usually become apparent during your late teens or early 20s. They can include:

- irregular periods or no periods at all
- difficulty getting pregnant as a result of irregular ovulation or failure to ovulate
- excessive hair growth (hirsutism) – usually on the face, chest, back or buttocks
- weight gain
- thinning hair and hair loss from the head
- oily skin or acne

PCOS is also associated with an increased risk of developing health problems in later life, such as type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol levels.

Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) also known as early menopause, occurs below the age of 40 and affects around 1 in 100 girls and women in the UK.

POI can occur as a result of surgical or medical treatment for other conditions (e.g. endometriosis, cancer, PMDD), can be associated with autoimmune disease (e.g. hypothyroidism, Addison's Disease) or genetic abnormalities (e.g. Fragile X Syndrome), or, rarely, may occur following severe infection (e.g. tuberculosis, malaria). However, for the vast majority of women no cause for POI is found. This is then known as spontaneous, or idiopathic, POI.

Specialist management of POI is necessary, not only to help alleviate associated symptoms but also to reduce the risk of chronic disease (in particular heart disease, osteoporosis and dementia) in later life.