

Sneak preview

Dear Reader,

Please enjoy this excerpt
from my bestselling book,
PCOS SOS.

If you'd like to read the
rest, the book is available
in its entirety on Amazon.

Additionally, please
consider leaving an honest
review. Reviews help other
women find my books and
access the life-changing
programs that I have
developed.

Thank you!

With deepest gratitude,
Felice Gersh, M.D.

PCOS SOS

A Gynecologist's Lifeline

To Naturally Restore

Your Rhythms, Hormones,
and Happiness

Felice Gersh, M.D.
with Alexis Perella

Health Disclaimer

This book contains advice and information relating to health care. It should be used to supplement rather than replace the advice of your doctor or another trained health professional. If you know or suspect you have a health problem, it is recommended that you seek your physician's advice before embarking on any medical program or treatment. All efforts have been made to assure the accuracy of the information contained in this book as of the date of publication. The publisher and the author disclaim liability for any medical outcome that may occur as a result of applying the methods suggested in this book.

Copyright © 2018 by Felice Gersh, M.D.

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Printed in the United States
First Printing, 2019

ISBN 978-1-950634-00-2 (Paperback)
ISBN 978-1-950634-01-9 (eBook)

Integrative Medical Press
4968 Booth Circle, Suite 101
Irvine, CA 92604
United States of America

Contents

Foreword by Felice Gersh, M.D.	iii
Foreword by Alexis Perella	xi
Prologue	xv
Introduction	1
Part One: What you need to know	11
Chapter 1: Get started right now	13
Chapter 2: What is PCOS?	27
Chapter 3: What causes PCOS?	43
Chapter 4: How do I heal?	55

Part Two: What you need to do	65
Chapter 5: STEP 1: Step into the light	67
Chapter 6: STEP 2: Get some sleep	91
Chapter 7: STEP 3: Eat to the beat	117
Chapter 8: STEP 4: Exercise any time you can	147
Chapter 9: STEP 5: Feed your gut	167
Chapter 10: STEP 6: Live clean and pure	211
Chapter 11: STEP 7: Personalize your plan	235
Chapter 12: PCOS – Today and into the future	301
Appendix A: Additional testing and bloodwork	313
Appendix B: PCOS science, advocacy, and community	319
Appendix C: Professional relationship disclosures	331
References	333
Index	367
Acknowledgments	375
About the Authors	377

Introduction



I am so excited you are here. You may feel excited, nervous, curious, skeptical, or guardedly optimistic.

One thing you are not: alone. I have helped thousands of women take the journey you are about to begin.

No two women are the same. No two cases of PCOS are the same. And no two PCOS treatment plans are the same. But they all have deep similarities. And they can all end with health.

Let's start yours.

Is this book for you?

PCOS (PEE-see-oh-ehs) is the acronym for polycystic ovary syndrome.

I'm including all of the medical terms for the conditions described in this book along with pronunciations because health literacy empowers patients to better advocate for themselves and their families. It's easier to Google when you know the proper name for something, and it's easier to discuss a symptom with your doctor when you know you are saying its name correctly.

If you have PCOS, you probably have a bunch of symptoms, and you may be wondering if this book will address your version of PCOS.

The short answer is, yes!

This is an integrative approach to healing that gets at the root causes of PCOS. So, no matter what your PCOS symptoms are and which ones are the most severe, they will get better when you treat the underlying causes of PCOS.

You are probably familiar with the typical medical approach. You decide what symptom is currently bothering you the most. Then you pick out the doctor who usually deals with that part of the body. If you have irregular menstrual cycles or fertility problems, you go to your gynecologist because she knows about uteruses. If you have acne, you go to your dermatologist, who knows about skin. If you have sleep problems, anxiety, or depression, which are very common, you go to a psychiatrist or therapist. If you have gut problems, such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or acid reflux, you go to the gastroenterologist.

Each doctor prescribes a treatment plan and likely gives you medication. None of them talk to each other. No one sees the whole picture.

In modern medicine, we treat the body like a series of parts. That's not what I do.

I am an integrative gynecologist, a rare breed of doctor who has trained to diagnose and treat your body as the whole, integrated, complex system that it is.

When I began practicing medicine this way, I was amazed that I could help my patients resolve a wide array of seemingly unrelated symptoms throughout their whole bodies by addressing deep, underlying health issues.

That's what this book does.

First, I will explain the underlying causes of PCOS and how they lead to all of the symptoms you are experiencing. Then, I will help you address those causes, and no matter what your PCOS symptoms are, they will get better.

It took me years to understand the body this way, so if you are feeling skeptical, I totally understand. I'll show you the research and data, and you can come to your own conclusions.

One of the tenets of integrative medicine is that a patient and her doctor are a team. I can't tell you what to do and I can't heal you. I can only work with you to create a path that we both believe will lead to health and wellness.

Everything in this book is based on scientific studies, often studies that were done in the last two to three years. Unless your doctor is obsessed with reading scientific journals every night the way I am, she probably hasn't heard much of this information yet. All of my resources are listed in the back of the book so you can check them out, analyze the findings, and share them with your doctors.

See what you think and then make the best decisions for you.

Structure of this book

The organization of this book will guide you, step-by-step, on your journey.

Part 1 provides everything you need to know about PCOS: what it is, how you got it, and how it works. I'll show you how this condition is caused by a simple hormonal irregularity that cascades into an incredibly complex condition. And I'll explain how restoring circadian rhythm, gut microbiome health, and clean living can be your keys to restoring your hormones, fertility, and health.

Part 2 offers all of my concrete advice for how to heal your PCOS, organized into seven practical steps. Steps one, two, and three focus on circadian rhythm. Steps four and five heal your gut microbiome. Step six gets endocrine disruptors out of your life. And step seven helps you fine-tune your wellness plan to meet your specific needs.

As my patients and kids can confirm, I give out a lot of advice. Most of it focuses on lifestyle and diet. Some of it includes supplements. I also cover a wide range of traditional treatment options, including the pharmaceuticals that I do and don't recommend.

I have laid out this treatment plan in a sequence that works well with my patients. It's logical and it focuses on some of the easier changes first so you can get started on your path to health right away.

But the recommendations are not hierarchical. The last ones are as critical to healing as the first ones. Depending on your particular PCOS, one section may prove more relevant than another, but at the end of the day, you will get the best results when you read all of the sections and adopt all (well, let's be realistic – *almost all*) of the tips together.

What is integrative medicine?

As a gynecologist, before I discovered integrative medicine, I was an expert in vaginas, uteruses, and the reproductive stages of a woman's life. I wasn't responsible for my patients' diabetes, heart disease, or autoimmune disorders. Other doctors took care of that. Just tell me what's wrong with your uterus, and I bet I have a pill or a surgery to make it better!

Integrative medicine takes a completely opposite approach. When I became an integrative gynecologist, I began looking at my patients' entire medical history because I learned how every system of the body affects every other system. Diabetes affects fertility. Acne is a sign of hormonal imbalance. Hypothyroidism can signal PCOS.

I also consider a much broader range of treatment options. There are definitely times when surgery, pharmaceuticals, and other medical interventions are the best course of action. I am a classically trained medical doctor, and I use these tools when they are appropriate.

But my toolbox is now much bigger. I also prescribe diet, lifestyle changes, acupuncture, supplements, exercise, laser treatments, and massage. When done properly in ways backed by rigorous scientific studies, these are powerful interventions that can change the course of a disease and a person's life.

A foundational theory of integrative medicine is that, because everything in the body is interrelated, we cannot just tinker with one part of the body. We cannot stop ovulation with birth control pills or stop stomach acid production with proton pump inhibitors without changing anything else. When you change one bodily system, you are inevitably affecting a bunch of other systems and organs. No treatment does just one thing. This is why pharmaceuticals have so many side effects.

On the positive side, when you fix one thing, you'll often find that you unintentionally fix a lot of other problems. You lose weight and your acne

clears up. You get daylight in the morning so you sleep better at night, and your eating disorder goes away. You eat less sugar so your blood sugar levels go down, and you start ovulating more regularly.

Your body is amazingly complex and we are only beginning to understand how it works. What we do know is that healing cascades into healing. This is what an integrative doctor specializes in. This is why I became an integrative gynecologist. And this is what I bring to you.

Let's talk about fertility

This is not a how-to-get-pregnant book, per se. But if you are hoping to get pregnant as soon as possible, or even a little further down the road, this book will help because the plan laid out here will help you reclaim your total health. Female fertility is inextricably linked to female health.

I want to say that again, because it's one of the most important takeaways from this book: Your natural menstrual cycle is a vital sign of health.

Messed up periods and infertility are signs of other health problems. Stress (mental and physical) triggers the body, as one of its most basic survival mechanisms, to shut down reproductive functions. People who are starving or under extreme stress, for example, are less fertile. So are people who have hormonal and metabolic dysfunctions, which are some of the underlying conditions of PCOS.

The solution to an irregular menstrual cycle is not to treat the symptoms by prescribing birth control pills or powerful fertility drugs. The solution is to address the root causes and restore total health so that natural reproductive functions start back up again.

Let's talk about weight loss

This is also not a weight-loss book, but if you are overweight (and at least 70% of women with PCOS are overweight or obese¹), then you will probably lose weight on this protocol. It wasn't my intention to create a weight-loss program. I don't care about your dress size. All women are beautiful and powerful. You are amazing as you are, and you are allowed to take up as much space in this world as you need.

But every single symptom of PCOS is worse for heavier women. Losing weight is one of the most powerful ways to restore your health. Losing weight indicates that the protocol is working and that you are regaining metabolic health. And losing weight will simultaneously magnify the positive benefits you are experiencing.

I talk a lot about metabolism (meh-TAB-oh-lizm), which is how your body makes, uses, and stores energy. We usually think of metabolism in term of weight-gain (storing energy as fat) and weight-loss (burning fat as energy). But it's more complicated than that. Metabolism relies on hormonal messengers. It includes every organ in the body, especially the liver, pancreas, and hypothalamus. It occurs primarily on a cellular level, with individual cells absorbing or repelling sugars and fats circulating in the blood to use for fuel. And it incorporates the health and lifespan of those cells. If you have metabolic health, all of these organs and processes work smoothly together.

Study after study shows that for women with PCOS, losing 5% to 10% of body weight improves fertility, improves metabolic health, and substantially reduces the risks of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer².

I hope you will get to a healthy weight because I want you to be healthy, but I will not ask you to diet, at least not in the typical sense of the word. I will never ask you to count calories.

Traditional dieting does not work, and besides, dieting is crappy. Yes, if you cut calories, you can lose weight. But your body is designed not to lose weight.

Throughout human history, starvation has been a greater threat than obesity, so human bodies are optimized to guard their extra weight as an insurance policy against the next famine. This has been a great survival strategy for the past 100,000 years or so, but it's less helpful now that humans have invented grocery stores, fast food restaurants, donuts, and chocolate bars (my favorite!). So even when women lose weight while dieting, they typically gain it all back.

The only sustainable way to lose weight is to reset your metabolic functions so your body naturally gravitates to a lower weight. Healthy eating (Is that a diet if you can still eat as much as you'd like?) will help. But it's not the whole plan. It's not even the main part of the plan.

The strategies for long-term weight loss are the same strategies for reigning in your PCOS, and they are the same strategies for establishing long-term, whole-body health.

They are:

1. Reduce inflammation
2. Normalize your hormones and their rhythms
3. Increase insulin sensitivity

What is inflammation?

Inflammation is your immune system's way to fight infections and heal wounds. When a part of your body is injured, immune cells rush to the site, and the resulting increase in blood causes redness and swelling. This works great to heal acute injuries. Unfortunately, the body treats chronic conditions like PCOS as chronic injuries, and you get chronic

inflammation. Instead of healing, chronic inflammation makes you sick. It causes diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and weight gain.

What are hormonal rhythms and balance?

Hormones are chemical messengers that tell your body what to do and when to do it. PCOS is an endocrine disorder because so many of our hormones are out of balance. We don't have the right levels of each hormone and our hormones don't behave the way they are supposed to. Testosterone, cortisol, and insulin are too high. Estrogen and serotonin are too low. And on top of that, these hormones don't cycle up and down properly with the 24-hour day, which causes anxiety, sleep disorders, infertility, and, yes, weight gain.

What is insulin sensitivity?

Insulin sensitivity is your body's ability to see and respond to insulin, a hormone that regulates blood sugar. Insulin plays such a critical role in PCOS symptoms that, even though it is part of hormonal balance, I want to call out insulin sensitivity as a unique piece of the PCOS puzzle.

PCOS makes you insulin resistant, which means your body can't react to insulin and your blood sugar goes up and down more than it should. This is the same condition that leads to type 2 diabetes. Additionally, insulin resistance causes inflammation and heart disease. It raises your testosterone levels, which exacerbates acne. And it keeps your body in fat storage mode, so you perpetually gain weight and never burn it.

How do I lose weight?

Losing weight is not about optimizing a calories-in-calories-out equation. It is about resetting the systems in your body so you use fat and sugar as fuel for your cells the way you are supposed to. It is about reducing inflammation and improving insulin sensitivity. It is about restoring hormonal rhythms and balance throughout your body. In short, you lose weight by healing PCOS.

Let's talk about health

I have PCOS. I have Hashimoto's thyroiditis. I am insulin resistant. I have androgenic alopecia and mild hirsutism. I am postmenopausal. I think of myself as adorably chubby, but really, I should lose another 10 pounds.

I am healthy.

Health is a feeling. It is the flexibility and resilience to recover from the challenges we experience while living life.

It is not a number, a dress size, a distance of miles run. Thank goodness!

It is not even the absence of disease. Today, anything that isn't "normal" or "ideal" is either a disease, a condition, or a syndrome. Everyone has something.

Health is a relationship to our bodies, our lives, our fellow creatures on this planet, and our environments. Health is an ability to move through the world with flexibility, strength, happiness, and confidence. It is physical, emotional, and social. And it is a dynamic process, not a finish line.

We don't get health. We live with health.

Consequently, it is totally possible to have PCOS and be healthy. Truly, gloriously, wonderfully healthy.

I hope you will come with me on this journey. You deserve to feel good in your body.

If you enjoyed this excerpt of PCOS SOS, feel free to share it with your friends and family who might benefit from this book.

PCOS SOS is available on Amazon and from all major book sellers.

Please consider leaving an online review so that more women can find this book and improve their health.

I am always writing, producing podcasts, and speaking at events. Stay in the know by following me on Instagram at @dr.felicegersh

With deepest gratitude,
Felice Gersh, M.D.