WORKING OUT
for inner health

PCOS has reproductive (anovulation, subfertility), metabolic (obesity, insulin resistance, increased risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease) and mental health (anxiety, depression, quality of life) consequences.

Evidence recommends lifestyle modification as first-line therapy; however, engaging women with PCOS in an appropriate physical activity program may be challenging.

Referral to an Accredited Exercise Physiologist provides the patient with a personalised exercise prescription and support to increase confidence in effective self-management.

ACCREDITED EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGISTS

An Accredited Exercise Physiologist is a specialist in the design and delivery of a personalised exercise prescription for people with chronic and complex diseases including PCOS. They are trained in dealing with barriers to physical activity and aim to equip their patients with the skills and confidence to guide their own physical activity programs for sustained engagement and improved health.

A secondary goal is to build fitness confidence to enable them to then join a fitness centre and work with personal trainers.

All women should aim for:

- 20–40 minutes daily of moderate intensity exercise, or 75–150 minutes weekly of vigorous exercise, or a combination of both
- less inactivity (sitting less) and more incidental activity on most days of the week
- muscle strengthening exercises (resistance training) twice a week.

Women with PCOS often face greater barriers to physical activity, including a lack of confidence in their ability to maintain physical activity, fear of injury due to the burden of PCOS, as well as poor body image, depression and anxiety.

Thus engaging women with PCOS in physical activities is a significant challenge. While gym memberships and personal trainers are regularly recommended, they may exacerbate barriers to exercise. Fitness instructors are generally diploma/certified qualified and not necessarily sympathetic to, or trained in, dealing with people who have underlying pathologies and mental health issues.

An Accredited Exercise Physiologist can treat people via the allied health Medicare scheme for chronic disease and complex care with GP referral, as part of a team care plan, for up to five individual treatment sessions per year. They also attract private health fund rebates.

In summary, women with PCOS, especially those considered overweight or obese, need to be engaged in an integrated lifestyle program, including physical activity and dietary and behaviour changes.

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Jean Hailes for Women’s Health is a national, not-for-profit organisation focusing on clinical care, innovative research and practical educational opportunities for health professionals and women.

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