A photograph of a woman from the waist down, wearing a light pink dress. She is holding her hands together in front of her, with her fingers interlaced. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome & Diet

What is Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS)?

PCOS is a common condition in women that effects how the ovaries function. About 1 in every 10 women have PCOS. It is a collection of problems which include:

- Acne
- Irregular or absent periods
- Ovarian cysts (observed via ultrasound)
- Obesity
- Infertility
- Hirsutism (excess hair on face and body)

Not everyone gets every symptom, which is why PCOS can be difficult to diagnose.

What causes PCOS?

PCOS is an insulin resistance syndrome. This means that your body is ignoring the insulin it normally produces. When this happens, your body produces more and more insulin, leading to high overall insulin levels. High insulin levels may cause:

- Weight gain which is common in PCOS sufferers
- Ovaries to produce more testosterone than normal

This increased level of testosterone can be associated with certain signs of PCOS - excess hair on face, arms, and upper body, acne and balding. The high testosterone levels also trigger a reaction in the body, which stops the ovaries from releasing eggs at the normal time, resulting in irregular periods and 'cysts' on the ovaries.

How Can a Low Glycaemic Index (GI) Diet Help?

A low Glycaemic Index (GI) diet will assist in keeping insulin levels low. It does this by keeping blood sugar as stable as possible. (See table below)

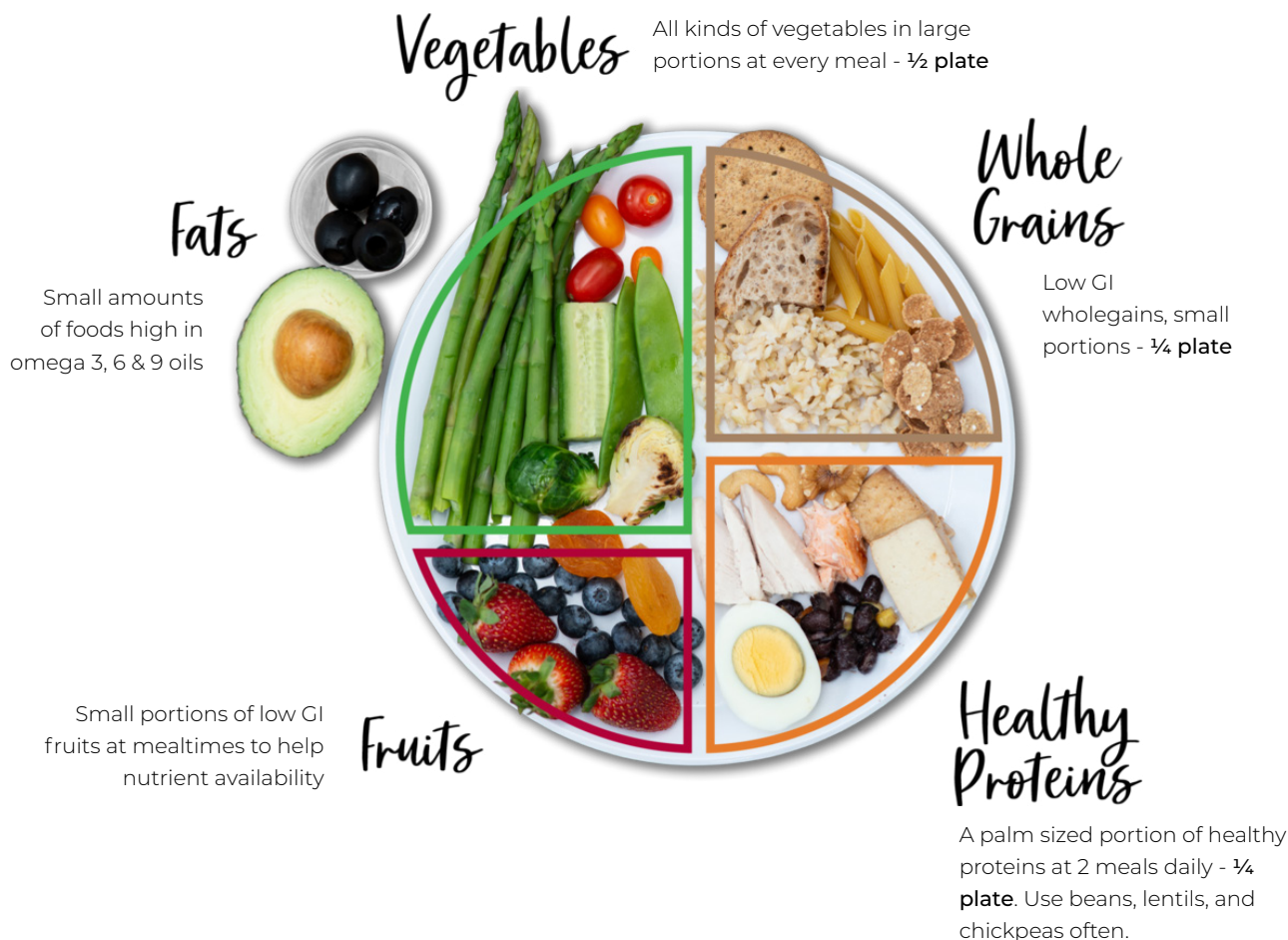
Any carbohydrate you eat – whether its sugar or starchy foods like pasta or potatoes – will increase blood sugar and result in an increase in insulin. However, some carbohydrates give a lower rise in blood sugar than others, and these are better foods to choose from.

It is recommended to have a BMI between 18.5 – 25 and an overall low GI, balanced diet.

Exercise improves insulin sensitivity, and a regular exercise routine is recommended regardless of BMI.

Checklist for diet with PCOS:

- Regular mealtimes - helps insulin response, hunger, and nutrient availability
- Low sugar - avoid added sugar & high sugar foods like sweets, cakes, biscuits, and fizzy drinks
- Low calorie - small portions, low fat, avoid alcohol
- Moderate amounts of low GI carbohydrate - use the PCOS plate as a guide
- Moderate protein - use the PCOS plate as a guide
- High fibre - include lots of vegetables, choose wholegrains, include seeds & legumes (beans & lentils)
- High nutrient density - include foods like nuts, oily fish, olives, avocado & fortified dairy foods
- Take a supplement of at least 10mcg Vitamin D3 and 400mcg Folic Acid daily. Your doctor or dietitian may recommend higher amounts depending on your individual situation.



Examples of Low Glycaemic Index (GI) Foods

Carbohydrates	Rolled oats Oat crackers Rye bread	Sweet potato Basmati rice Pasta	New potatoes Pita bread	Wraps Shredded wheat
Meat, Poultry and Fish	All meat	Poultry	Fish	Eggs
Fruit	Apple Cherries	Plum Orange	Strawberries Peach	Pear Kiwi
Vegetables	Lentils Baked beans Butter beans	Haricot beans Kidney beans	Soya beans Green vegetables	Salad vegetables Vegetable juices
Dairy	Fortified milk	Unsweetened yogurt	Cheese	Unsweetened and fortified dairy substitutes e.g., nut milk.

Nutrition advice works best when tailored to the person, their symptoms, blood results and lifestyle. Dietary change will always be complemented by exercise. **For more information / advice from a registered dietitian that specialises in PCOS please email the team at info@orlawalshnutrition.ie**