

## Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) Glossary of Terms

**Amenorrhea** – When a female does not have a menstrual period for at least 6 months.

**Androgens** - Hormones that cause male sex characteristics. Both males and females have them.

**Anovulation** - When a female does not ovulate (release an egg from an ovary).

**Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART)** – A procedure in which eggs are removed from the ovaries and combined with sperm to help a woman get pregnant.

**ART cycle** – A process that involves the use of assisted reproductive technology along with stimulation of the ovaries and possibly frozen embryos.

**Cauterize** - To burn tissue in order to remove it or seal it.

**Endometrial biopsy** - A test in which a small piece of the endometrium (the inner lining of the uterus) is removed to see how viable it might be for an embryo to attach.

**Endometrium** - The inner lining of the uterus (womb). This is where an embryo implants (attaches).

**Estradiol** - A female hormone (a type of estrogen) that helps make the lining of the uterus thicken during the first half of the menstrual cycle. The level of estradiol can be measured to see how a woman might respond to medicines that stimulate ovulation, such as Follistim, Repronex, or Gonal-F.

**Follicles** - Small, round structures just under the surface of an ovary. A follicle has an egg surrounded by a layer of cells and fluid. Follicles grow during the first part of the menstrual cycle. When the follicle is fully grown, it breaks, releasing the egg. This is called ovulation.

**Follicular fluid** - Fluid surrounding an egg inside a follicle in an ovary.

**Follicular phase** – The time during the ovulation cycle when the follicle develops and the endometrium (lining of the uterus) thickens.

**Gonad** – An ovary (female) or testicle (male). Ovaries produce eggs; testicles (testes) produce sperm.

**Hyperprolactinemia** – A condition in which the levels of prolactin, a hormone that helps females produce milk, are abnormally high.

**Hypothalamus** - The part of the brain that triggers the pituitary gland to release follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH). These hormones affect fertility in both females and males.

**Infertility** – The inability of a female to become pregnant or a male to impregnate a female. A female 35 or younger is considered infertile if she cannot get pregnant after 1 year of unprotected intercourse. A female over 35 is considered infertile if she cannot get pregnant after 6 months of unprotected intercourse. A male is considered infertile if he cannot produce enough healthy sperm to fertilize an egg.

**Luteinizing hormone (LH)** - A hormone that affects ovulation.

**Luteal phase** - The part of a female's menstrual cycle after ovulation. During this phase the lining of the uterus thickens as it prepares for an embryo to implant (attach).

**Menstrual cycle** – The menstrual cycle runs from the start of one period to the start of the next—about a month.

**Oligomenorrhea** – When a female does not have regular periods.

**Oocyte** – An egg, or ovum.

**Ovulation** – When a follicle in an ovary releases an egg. This usually occurs about 2 weeks after the start of menstruation (i.e., about halfway through it).

**Pituitary gland** – A small gland that releases follicle stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH). These hormones affect fertility in both females and males.

**Progesterone** - A female hormone that supports pregnancy. During an ART cycle, progesterone is usually given after embryos are put into the uterus.

**Prolactin** - A female hormone. Too much prolactin, which can be caused by a benign (non-cancerous) tumor, can result in infertility.

**Testosterone** - The male hormone. It is responsible for male sex characteristics, including making sperm.

**Thyroid gland** - A gland at the base of the neck. It makes hormones that regulate metabolism (how your body uses energy) and many basic bodily functions.

**Transvaginal** – Literally, “through the vagina.” For example, a transvaginal ultrasound can show the ovary through the vagina.

**Ultrasound** - High-frequency sound waves that can be used to see an image of internal organs.

**Uterine fibroid** – A benign (non-cancerous) tumor of the uterus that may need to be removed if it has grown inside the uterus.

**Uterine polyp** – A benign (non-cancerous) tumor of the uterus that can bleed easily and may need to be removed.

**Uterus** – Commonly called the womb. The uterus is the female organ in which the fetus develops during pregnancy.

Visit [Vanderbilt Health](#) for more information on PCOS, or to make an appointment with our PCOS care team.