The use of self help-measures (diet and exercise) and complementary medicine (CAM) by women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

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Research questions

Do women with PCOS engage in self-help measures including diet, exercise and the use of complementary medicine (CAM) to manage their PCOS?

What are their patterns of use?

Which practices (if any) do they perceive to be most effective?

Are there any adverse reactions?
Methods and Results

493 people responded to the survey
Nov 2012- June 2013

POSAA 189 (73.2%)

Facebook group 304
Signs and symptoms experienced all or most of the time

- Late menstrual period (n=453)
  - 67.1%
- Menstrual cramps (n=460)
  - 59.6%
- Skin blemishes on face back and/or neck (n=465)
  - 51.4%
- Depressed as a result of PCOS (n=455)
  - 44.0%
- Visible hair growth of face or body (n=475)
  - 68.8%
- Waist is larger than hips (n=450)
  - 50.0%
- Overweight (n=462)
  - 77.3%
- Very overweight (n=433)
  - 51.5%
- Sugar or insulin imbalances (n=451)
  - 55.7%
- Infertility (n=412)
  - 60.2%
Achievement of health goals for types of diets

- low GI diet (n=247)
  - 34% no
  - 46% partly
  - 13% yes

- low calorie diet (n=181)
  - 38% no
  - 49% partly
  - 9% yes

- low fat diet (n=162)
  - 38% no
  - 47% partly
  - 10% yes

- Lifescrpts diet (n=23)
  - 17% no
  - 44% partly
  - 39% yes

- low carbohydrate diet (n=166)
  - 13% no
  - 56% partly
  - 27% yes
Respondents who felt they achieved their health goals using exercise (n=322)

- Yes: 8% (± 2.93, 95% CI)
- No: 40%
- Partly: 52%
Use of Complementary Medicines

- **Yes**: 70.3% (± 4.31 95% CI)
- **No**: 29.7%
Perceptions of effectiveness when using CAM for specified reasons

- PCOS: 40.8%
- General wellbeing: 71.1%
- Infertility: 32.4%
- Pain: 61.8%
- PMS: 66.0%
- Sleep: 70.3%

Legend:
- Light blue: using CAM to treat
- Dark blue: % self-perceived effective
**Strengths and weaknesses**

- Correlation between the demographics of women with PCOS and Social Media users.
- First to explore prevalence and patterns of use for CAM by women with PCOS.
- High response rate and number of responses.
- Self-reported data at risk for discrepancy between self-perceived activity and caloric intake versus actual activity and caloric intake. Overweight women most susceptible.
- Electronic survey limited to people with access to a computer.
Most respondents were using diet and exercise to manage PCOS

Only 6% of respondents were using the Lifescripts diet, recommended in the EBG

40% of respondents felt they had not even partly achieved their health goals using exercise

Over 70% of respondents were regular users of complementary medicine

Perceptions of effectiveness for CAM increased when used with particular treatment aims in mind