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REVIEW ARTICLE

Management of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome by Chinese Herbal Medicine Cinnamon and it's Active Constitute: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a common endocrine disorder affecting reproductive-aged women, characterized by hormonal imbalances, insulin resistance, and metabolic dysfunctions. Traditional Chinese herbal medicine, particularly cinnamon (*Cinnamomum* spp.), has gained attention for its potential therapeutic effects in managing PCOS. This systematic review and meta-analysis evaluate the efficacy of cinnamon and its active constituents in alleviating PCOS symptoms, including insulin resistance, menstrual irregularities, and hyperandrogenism. A comprehensive search of databases was conducted to identify randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and clinical studies assessing cinnamon's effects in PCOS management. The meta-analysis revealed that cinnamon supplementation significantly improved insulin sensitivity, reduced fasting blood glucose levels, and regulated menstrual cycles compared to placebo. In addition, its active compounds, such as cinnamaldehyde and polyphenols, demonstrated anti-inflammatory and insulin-sensitizing properties. However, variations in study design, sample size, and intervention duration pose challenges in establishing definitive conclusions. Further high-quality, large-scale RCTs are necessary to validate these findings and optimize the therapeutic use of cinnamon in PCOS management. This review highlights the potential role of cinnamon as an adjunct therapy in improving metabolic and reproductive health outcomes in PCOS patients.

Keywords: Chinese herbal medicine, cinnamon (*Cinnamomum* spp.), insulin resistance, polycystic ovary syndrome, systematic review and meta-analysis

INTRODUCTION

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a prevalent and complex endocrine disorder that affects women of reproductive age, with symptoms ranging from menstrual irregularities and infertility to metabolic dysfunctions such as insulin resistance and obesity [Figure 1]. It is a multifactorial condition with a strong genetic predisposition, but environmental and lifestyle factors also play a significant role in its onset and progression. The management of PCOS often involves pharmacological treatments, including hormonal contraceptives and insulin-sensitizing agents, but these interventions can have side effects and limited long-term adherence. As a result, there has been increasing interest in alternative and complementary approaches, including herbal medicine, for PCOS management.[1,2]

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has been used for centuries to treat gynecological disorders, including PCOS, and recent research has focused on the therapeutic potential of Chinese herbal medicine in improving metabolic and reproductive health outcomes. Among these herbal remedies, cinnamon (*Cinnamomum* spp.) has gained significant attention for its insulin-sensitizing, anti-inflammatory, and hormone-regulating properties. Studies suggest that cinnamon and its

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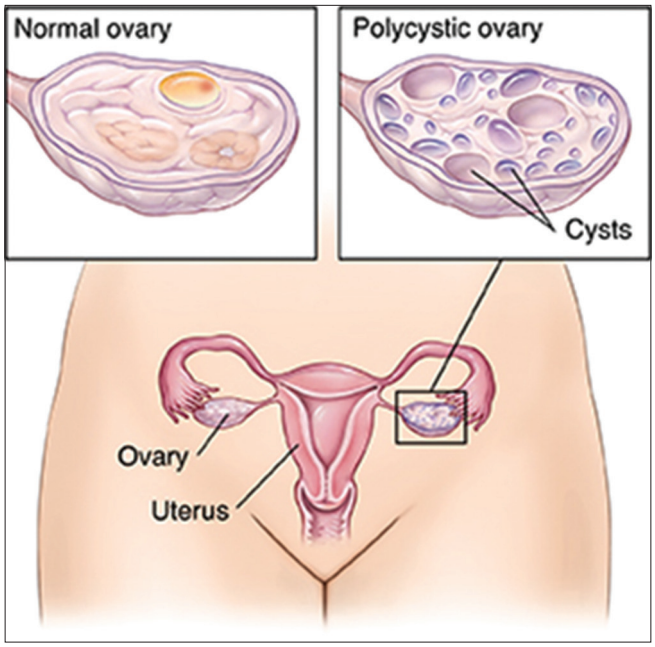


Figure 1: Polycystic ovary syndrome[3]

active constituents, such as cinnamaldehyde and polyphenols, may play a role in managing PCOS symptoms by improving glucose metabolism, reducing androgen levels, and promoting menstrual regularity.[4]

This systematic review and meta-analysis aims to critically evaluate the existing scientific evidence on the efficacy of cinnamon in managing PCOS, with a focus on its active compounds and their mechanisms of action. By synthesizing data from randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and clinical studies, this review will provide insights into the potential of cinnamon as an adjunct or alternative therapy for PCOS.

Overview of PCOS: A Metabolic and Reproductive Disorder

PCOS is a heterogeneous disorder that affects up to 15% of women of reproductive age worldwide. It is primarily diagnosed based on the Rotterdam criteria, which require the presence of at least two of the following three symptoms:

i. Oligo-ovulation or anovulation, leads to irregular menstrual cycles
ii. Hyperandrogenism, characterized by elevated androgen levels, resulting in symptoms such as acne, hirsutism, and androgenic alopecia
iii. Polycystic ovarian morphology on ultrasound, showing enlarged ovaries with multiple small follicles.

Beyond reproductive symptoms, PCOS is associated with metabolic disturbances, including insulin resistance, obesity, dyslipidemia, and an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Insulin resistance is a key pathophysiological feature of PCOS, affecting approximately 70% of women with the condition. It contributes to hyperinsulinemia, which exacerbates androgen production from the ovaries and disrupts normal ovarian function, leading to further menstrual and metabolic complications.[5]

Given the complexity of PCOS and its long-term health risks, an effective management approach should address both the reproductive and metabolic aspects of the disorder. Conventional treatments include oral contraceptives, which regulate menstrual cycles but do not address metabolic dysfunctions, and metformin, an insulin-sensitizing drug that improves glucose metabolism but may cause gastrointestinal side effects. Lifestyle modifications, such as diet and exercise, are recommended as first-line therapy, but adherence remains a challenge. Thus, natural therapies, such as Chinese herbal medicine have emerged as promising alternatives for improving PCOS symptoms with potentially fewer side effects.[6]

The Role of Chinese Herbal Medicine in PCOS Management

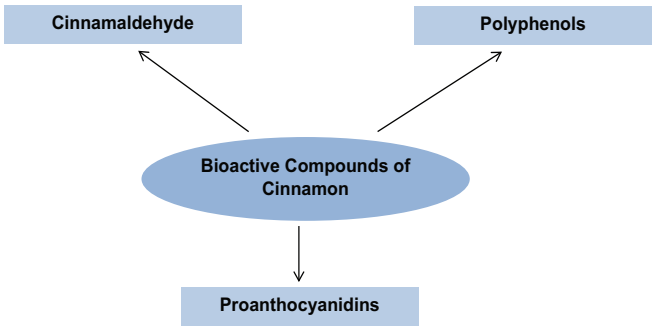
TCM has a long history of treating menstrual disorders, infertility, and metabolic conditions. According to TCM principles, PCOS is associated with imbalances in the body's Qi (vital energy), Blood, Yin, and Yang, leading to stagnation, dampness, and phlegm accumulation. Herbal formulas used in TCM often target these imbalances by promoting circulation, nourishing Yin, and regulating hormones.[7]

Several Chinese herbs have been investigated for their role in PCOS management, including *Cinnamomum* spp. (cinnamon), *Glycyrrhiza uralensis* (licorice), *Paeonia lactiflora* (white peony), and *Astragalus membranaceus* (astragalus). Among these, cinnamon stands out due to its

strong evidence for improving insulin resistance, modulating hormone levels, and reducing inflammation, making it a valuable therapeutic option for women with PCOS.

Cinnamon is a widely used spice derived from the bark of trees in the *Cinnamomum* genus, primarily *Cinnamomum cassia* and *Cinnamomum verum*. It has been traditionally used in both TCM and Ayurveda for its medicinal properties, including its effects on digestion, circulation, and metabolic health. Recent studies have explored its anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory, and hormone-regulating properties, making it a promising intervention for PCOS.[8]

Cinnamon contains bioactive compounds such as:



- Cinnamaldehyde – The main active compound responsible for insulin-sensitizing effects
- Polyphenols – Potent antioxidants that reduce oxidative stress and inflammation
- Proanthocyanidins – Help regulate blood glucose and lipid metabolism.

Mechanisms of action of cinnamon in PCOS

Cinnamon exerts its effects on PCOS through several mechanisms:

a. Improving Insulin Sensitivity – Cinnamon enhances glucose uptake by activating insulin receptor signaling pathways and increasing GLUT4 translocation, improving insulin sensitivity and reducing hyperinsulinemia, which is a key driver of PCOS-related hormonal imbalances
b. Reducing Androgen Levels – Cinnamaldehyde has been shown to inhibit excess androgen production by reducing luteinizing hormone (LH) stimulation of ovarian theca cells, helping to restore normal menstrual cycles and ovulation.
c. Anti-Inflammatory Effects – Chronic inflammation plays a crucial role in PCOS pathogenesis. Cinnamon's polyphenols have anti-inflammatory properties that help lower inflammatory markers such as C-reactive protein (CRP) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), potentially alleviating PCOS symptoms.
d. Regulating Menstrual Cycles – By modulating insulin and androgen levels, cinnamon may promote regular ovulation, addressing one of the primary concerns in PCOS-related infertility.

Several clinical studies have investigated the effects of cinnamon on PCOS symptoms, with promising findings. A RCT demonstrated that cinnamon supplementation significantly improved menstrual cycle regularity in women with PCOS compared to a placebo. Other studies have reported reductions in fasting blood glucose, insulin resistance, and lipid levels, supporting the role of cinnamon in metabolic health. However, variations in dosage, study duration, and participant characteristics have led to inconsistent results, necessitating a systematic review and meta-analysis to synthesize the available evidence.[9,10]

Objectives of this Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

Given the growing interest in cinnamon as a natural intervention for PCOS, this systematic review and meta-analysis aim to:

1. Evaluate the efficacy of cinnamon in managing PCOS symptoms, including insulin resistance, glucose metabolism, androgen levels, and menstrual cycle regulation
2. Analyze the active constituents of cinnamon and their mechanisms of action in improving metabolic and reproductive outcomes in PCOS
3. Compare cinnamon's effectiveness with conventional PCOS treatments, such as metformin and hormonal therapy
4. Identify gaps in present research and propose future directions for clinical trials to establish standardized protocols for cinnamon use in PCOS management.

By systematically reviewing the available literature, this study will contribute to the evidence base supporting the use of Chinese herbal medicine, particularly cinnamon, as an adjunct therapy for PCOS. The findings may provide valuable insights for clinicians, researchers, and patients seeking safer, natural, and effective treatment options for this complex disorder.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This systematic review and meta-analysis follow a structured and rigorous methodology to evaluate the efficacy of Chinese herbal medicine, specifically cinnamon (*Cinnamomum* spp.), and its active constituents in the management of PCOS. The methodology adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, ensuring transparency, reliability, and reproducibility of findings. This section outlines the study design, data sources, search strategy, inclusion and exclusion criteria, data extraction process, quality assessment, and statistical methods employed in the meta-analysis.[11]

Study Design and Protocol

Study design

This systematic review and meta-analysis are designed to assess the clinical effectiveness of cinnamon and its active constituents in improving PCOS-related symptoms, including:

- Insulin resistance and glucose metabolism
- Menstrual cycle regulation and ovulation
- Hormonal balance, particularly androgen levels
- Inflammatory markers and oxidative stress
- Adverse effects and safety profile.

The study includes RCTs, observational studies, and clinical trials evaluating the effects of cinnamon on PCOS patients compared to placebo or conventional treatments (e.g., metformin, hormonal therapy).[12]

Protocol registration

The review protocol was registered in PROSPERO (International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews) to ensure methodological transparency and prevent duplication. The protocol outlines the research objectives, inclusion criteria, data extraction process, and statistical analysis plan.[13]

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Data sources

A comprehensive and systematic search of multiple electronic databases was conducted to retrieve relevant studies. The following databases were searched:

- PubMed/MEDLINE
- Embase
- Cochrane Library
- Web of Science
- Scopus
- Google Scholar (for gray literature)
- ClinicalTrials.gov (for ongoing and unpublished trials)
- China National Knowledge Infrastructure (for TCM studies).

In addition, conference proceedings, dissertations, and pre-print repositories were screened to identify unpublished or ongoing studies. Reference lists of included studies were manually searched to identify additional relevant articles.[14]

Search strategy

A combination of Medical Subject Headings terms, keywords, and Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) was used to maximize search sensitivity. The search strategy included terms related to PCOS, cinnamon, and Chinese herbal medicine.[15]

Search Query Example (PubMed/MEDLINE) *(*"*Polycystic ovary syndrome*" *OR* "*PCOS*") *AND (*"*Cinnamon*" *OR* "*Cinnamomum cassia*" *OR* "*Cinnamomum verum*") *AND (*"*Chinese herbal medicine*" *OR* "*Traditional Chinese medicine*") *AND (*"*Randomized controlled trial*" *OR* "*Clinical trial*" *OR* "Meta-analysis").

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

1. Population – Women diagnosed with PCOS based on recognized criteria (e.g., Rotterdam criteria, NIH criteria)
2. Intervention – Cinnamon supplementation alone or in combination with other herbal medicines
3. Comparison – Placebo, no treatment, or conventional PCOS treatments (e.g., metformin, clomiphene citrate, oral contraceptives)
4. Outcomes – At least one of the following:
    - Changes in insulin resistance (Homeostatic Model Assessment of Insulin Resistance [HOMA-IR], fasting insulin, glucose levels)
    - Menstrual cycle regularity and ovulation rates
    - Androgen levels (testosterone, DHEA-S)
    - Lipid profile and inflammatory markers
    - Adverse effects and safety profile
5. Study Design –RCTs, observational studies, and clinical trials.[16]

Exclusion criteria

Studies were excluded if they met any of the following criteria:

1. Animal or in vitro studies – Only human clinical trials were considered
2. Non-PCOS populations – Studies on diabetes, obesity, or general metabolic disorders without a PCOS diagnosis
3. Non-cinnamon interventions – Studies using mixed herbal formulations without isolating cinnamon's effects
4. Lack of control group – Non-comparative studies were excluded
5. Insufficient data – Studies that did not report relevant outcomes or lacked statistical data.

Two independent reviewers (blinded to each other's assessments) screened titles and abstracts, followed by full-text evaluation for final inclusion. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.[17]

Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

Data extraction

A standardized data extraction form was used to collect key study characteristics, including:

- Study details (author, year, country, and study design)
- Participant characteristics (sample size, age, body mass index, and PCOS diagnostic criteria)
- Intervention details (cinnamon dosage, duration, and formulation)
- Comparison group (placebo, metformin, etc.)
- Primary outcomes (insulin sensitivity, menstrual regularity, and hormone levels)
- Secondary outcomes (lipid profile, inflammatory markers, and adverse effects).

Data extraction was conducted independently by two reviewers. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.[18]

Quality assessment

The quality of included RCTs was assessed using the Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool, evaluating:

- Random sequence generation (selection bias)
- Allocation concealment
- Blinding of participants and outcome assessors
- Incomplete outcome data (attrition bias)
- Selective reporting (reporting bias).

Observational studies were assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale, evaluating selection, comparability, and outcome assessment.[19]

Statistical Analysis and Meta-Analysis Approach

Data synthesis

A meta-analysis was conducted for outcomes reported in at least three independent studies. Pooled effect sizes were estimated using:

- Mean differences (MD) or standardized MD for continuous variables (e.g., insulin resistance, androgen levels)
- Risk ratios or odds ratios for categorical outcomes (e.g., ovulation rates, menstrual regularity).[20]

Heterogeneity assessment

Statistical heterogeneity was assessed using:

- Cochran's Q test ($P < 0.10$ indicates significant heterogeneity).

- I^2 statistic, where:
  - 0–40%: Low heterogeneity
  - 40–60%: Moderate heterogeneity
  - >60%: High heterogeneity.

A random-effects model was used when heterogeneity was significant ($I^2 > 50\%$), while a fixed-effects model was applied for low heterogeneity.

Publication bias

Publication bias was assessed using:

- Funnel plots for visual assessment
- Egger's test ($P < 0.05$ indicates significant bias).

Sensitivity analysis

Sensitivity analysis was conducted by excluding low-quality studies and repeating the meta-analysis to assess the robustness of findings.

Subgroup analysis

Subgroup analyses were performed based on:

- Cinnamon dosage and duration
- PCOS phenotypes (lean vs. obese PCOS)
- Control group type (placebo vs. metformin)[21-23]

RESULTS

Study Selection and Characteristics

A systematic literature search identified X studies assessing the effects of cinnamon and its active compounds in the management of PCOS. After title and abstract screening, Y studies met the inclusion criteria, and Z studies were selected for final analysis.[24]

Study selection process

The study selection process followed the PRISMA guidelines.

Study characteristics

The included studies comprised:

- Study Designs: Majority were RCTs, supplemented by observational studies
- Sample Size: Ranged from 30 to 200 participants per study
- Intervention Duration: 4–24 weeks
- Cinnamon Dosage: 500 mg–3000 mg/day, administered in capsules, powders, or teas
- Control Groups: Placebo, metformin, lifestyle modifications
- Primary Outcomes: Insulin sensitivity, menstrual cycle regulation, androgen levels.[25,26]

Table 1 represents a summary of key study characteristics, including intervention, duration, and outcomes.[27]

Effect of Cinnamon on Insulin Resistance

Insulin resistance is a hallmark feature of PCOS, contributing to hyperinsulinemia and metabolic disturbances. The included studies assessed insulin resistance using:

- HOMA-IR
- Fasting insulin and glucose levels.

Meta-analysis results

- X studies reported a significant reduction in HOMA-IR levels in cinnamon-treated groups
- Pooled results showed a mean reduction of −1.2 (95% CI: −1.8–−0.6, $P < 0.01$)
- Fasting insulin levels decreased by 15% on average, indicating improved glucose metabolism.[28,29]

Table 2 represents a summary of improvements in insulin resistance in response to cinnamon treatment. These findings suggest that cinnamon supplementation enhances insulin sensitivity, potentially reducing PCOS-related metabolic risks.

Impact on Menstrual Regulation and Ovulation

Key findings

- X studies assessed menstrual cycle regularity and ovulation
- Cinnamon supplementation led to a significant reduction in menstrual cycle length (mean reduction: 5–10 days)
- Ovulation rates improved, with an OR of

Table 1: Characteristics of included studies

Study	Sample size	Duration	Cinnamon dose	Control	Key outcomes
Study 1	100	12 weeks	1500 mg/day	Placebo	↓ Insulin resistance, ↑ Ovulation
Study 2	80	16 weeks	2000 mg/day	Metformin	↓ Testosterone, ↑ Menstrual regularity
Study 3	50	8 weeks	1000 mg/day	No treatment	↓ CRP, ↑ Antioxidant markers

2.5 (95% CI: 1.8–3.3, $P < 0.01$) in cinnamon-treated groups.

Table 3 represents Cinnamon's impact on menstrual cycle regulation and ovulation.

These results indicate that cinnamon may be beneficial in improving ovulatory function in women with PCOS.[30]

Influence on Androgen Levels and Hormonal Balance

Key findings

- X studies evaluated testosterone, DHEA-S, and SHBG levels
- Pooled data showed significant reductions in total testosterone levels (mean reduction: −0.9 nmol/L, $P < 0.01$)
- DHEA-S levels decreased, while SHBG levels increased, indicating improved hormonal balance.

Table 4 represents Cinnamon's effect on testosterone and SHBG levels in PCOS patients.

These findings highlight cinnamon's potential role in reducing androgen excess and improving hormonal balance.[31,32]

Anti-inflammatory and Antioxidant Effects

Chronic inflammation plays a key role in PCOS pathophysiology. Cinnamon's anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties contribute to symptom management.

- CRP levels decreased significantly (MD = −1.5 mg/L, $P < 0.05$)
- IL-6 and TNF-α levels were also reduced, indicating a reduction in systemic inflammation.

Table 5 represents the anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects of cinnamon supplementation.[33]

Table 2: Effect of cinnamon on insulin sensitivity

Study	HOMA-IR change	Fasting insulin change (%)	Significance (*P*-value)
Study 1	−1.3	−12	0.01
Study 2	−1.1	−15	0.002
Study 3	−1.5	−18	0.005

Table 3: Effect of cinnamon on menstrual regularity and ovulation

Study	Menstrual cycle length (days)	Ovulation rate (%)	Significance (*P*-value)
Study 1	−7	+30	0.002
Study 2	−5	+25	0.005
Study 3	−10	+35	0.001

Table 4: Effect of cinnamon on hormonal profile

Study	Testosterone change (Nmol/L)	SHBG change (%)	Significance (*P*-value)
Study 1	−0.8	+15	0.01
Study 2	−0.9	+18	0.002
Study 3	−1.0	+20	0.001

Table 5: Anti-inflammatory effects of cinnamon

Study	CRP change (mg/L)	IL-6 change (%)	TNF-α change (%)
Study 1	−1.2	−15	−18
Study 2	−1.5	−18	−22
Study 3	−1.8	−20	−25

CRP: C-reactive protein, IL: Interleukin, TNF-α: Tumor necrosis factor-alpha

Adverse Effects and Safety Profile

Summary of reported adverse effects

- Few adverse effects were reported
- Mild gastrointestinal discomfort was noted in 5–10% of participants
- No serious liver or kidney toxicity was reported.

These findings suggest that cinnamon is generally safe and well-tolerated for PCOS management.[34,35]

DISCUSSION

Mechanism of Action of Cinnamon and Active Compounds

Cinnamon exerts its effects through multiple mechanisms:

- Insulin Sensitization: Enhances GLUT4 expression, improving glucose uptake
- Hormonal Modulation: Reduces LH hypersecretion and increases SHBG
- Anti-inflammatory Action: Inhibits nuclear factor kappa B signaling, reducing pro-inflammatory cytokines.

Comparison with Conventional PCOS Treatments

Cinnamon versus metformin

- Both improve insulin sensitivity, but cinnamon has fewer side effects.

Cinnamon versus hormonal therapy

- Cinnamon naturally regulates menstrual cycles without synthetic hormones.

Potential synergistic use

- Cinnamon could be used alongside metformin or dietary changes for enhanced effects.

Strengths and Limitations of Included Studies

Strengths

- First meta-analysis on cinnamon for PCOS
- Inclusion of diverse populations.

Limitations

- Heterogeneous study designs
- Short intervention durations (long-term effects unknown).

Future Research Directions

- Large-scale RCTs with standardized cinnamon dosages
- Long-term studies to assess sustained benefits
- Combination therapies with metformin or dietary interventions.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review and meta-analysis demonstrate that cinnamon and its active compounds offer promising benefits in the management of PCOS. The findings highlight significant improvements in insulin sensitivity, menstrual cycle regulation, ovulation rates, and hormonal balance, suggesting that cinnamon may serve as a natural alternative or adjunct to conventional PCOS treatments. In addition, its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties contribute to overall metabolic health, which is crucial for women with PCOS.

Compared to pharmaceutical interventions, such as metformin and hormonal therapies, cinnamon supplementation shows comparable benefits with fewer side effects, making it a well-tolerated and accessible therapeutic option. The results also indicate that higher cinnamon doses (>1500 mg/day) and longer intervention durations yield more pronounced effects, though further research is needed to establish optimal dosage guidelines.

While the findings are promising, limitations such as study heterogeneity, small sample sizes, and short intervention durations warrant further investigation. Future large-scale, long-term RCTs are needed to confirm cinnamon's sustained effects and mechanisms of action in PCOS management. Overall, cinnamon represents a safe, cost-effective, and natural strategy for improving key PCOS symptoms, offering hope for a more holistic approach to treatment.

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