

LIFESTYLE AS MEDICINE

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WELCOME | LIFESTYLE AS MEDICINE | HEALTH |
ENGLAND



This week in Lifestyle as Medicine

26 Lifestyle Medicine messages for 2026

2. Small changes matter

Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS).

What is it, who gets it, does lifestyle make a difference?

Why Small Changes Work Better Than Big Ones

Large, sudden changes often fail because they:

- Trigger stress responses
- Increase cortisol
- Are hard to sustain
- Create “all-or-nothing” thinking

Small changes:

- Lower the threat response
- Are easier to repeat
- Become habits instead of projects
- Compound quietly

Biology prefers **consistency over intensity**.



THE POWER OF COMPOUNDING
Compound interest VS Simple interest



Compounding Works in Biology Too

A 10-minute walk after meals can:

- Lower post-meal glucose
- Reduce insulin demand
- Improve mitochondrial function
- Improve sleep that night

A protein-forward breakfast can:

- Stabilize blood sugar
- Reduce cravings later in the day
- Lower cortisol
- Improve energy and focus

None of these are dramatic.

Together, over weeks and months, they change the *baseline*.

Small Changes Target Root Causes

Lifestyle medicine is not about willpower. It's about physiology (and habits)

Small changes can improve insulin sensitivity and reduce low-grade inflammation. It can support hormone signalling and improve gut microbiome balance.

And it can help restore our circadian rhythms

When root causes improve, symptoms often follow—sometimes surprisingly quickly.

The “Minimum Effective Dose” Mindset

You don't need to do everything.

You need to do **something that works**, consistently.

Improve one meal? Build in a movement habit? Soften a stressor?

One newsletter reader tells me she has lost more than 9 stones in weight-starting with step-ups on the stairs in her own home.

57kg

One change done daily beats five changes done briefly.

Progress Often Feels Invisible at First because early improvements happen internally:

- Better insulin signalling, reduced inflammatory markers, improved nervous system tone

You may not see these immediately—but your body feels them.

By the time weight, blood tests, or symptoms change, the process has usually been underway for weeks.

Small Does Not Mean Insignificant

In medicine, we accept that:

- Small doses of medication matter
- Small lab changes matter
- Small physiologic shifts matter

Lifestyle inputs work the same way.

Small changes are not “less serious.”

They are **how biology actually adapts**.

Another newsletter reader started by swapping her ‘drink of choice’ from diet coke (she thought it was healthy) to sparkling water.

Other changes followed, became central to her new lifestyle- and she has now lost an amazing 4.5 stones, taken control of her diabetes, and become much more mobile.

HbA1c 79 to 41

Weight ↓ 27kg

So- You don't need a new life.

You need a slightly different *pattern*.

And patterns are built one small choice at a time.

If you're consistent, your body will meet you there.

Not sure where to start?

Stuck for ideas?

[BBC Radio 4 - Just One Thing - with Michael Mosley - Downloads](#)

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS): A hot topic on the WhatsApp group recently.

What is PCOS?

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is a common long-term health condition that affects hormones, metabolism, and energy regulation.

It affects around 1 in 10 people of biological women.

Despite the name, PCOS is not mainly about ovarian cysts. It is better understood as a condition involving hormone imbalance and reduced sensitivity to insulin.

What's happening in the body?

In most people with PCOS:

- The body does not respond well to insulin
- The body produces higher insulin levels
- High insulin stimulates the ovaries to produce more androgens (male-type hormones)

This hormone imbalance can disrupt:

- Ovulation and menstrual cycles
- Skin and hair
- Energy levels
- Weight regulation

Common features of PCOS

People with PCOS may experience:

- Irregular or absent periods
- Difficulty getting pregnant
- Acne or oily skin
- Excess facial or body hair
- Hair thinning on the scalp
- Fatigue or low energy
- Weight gain or difficulty losing weight



Important:

- Symptoms vary widely
- Not everyone has all symptoms
- PCOS occurs at any body size

Why the name “PCOS” is misleading

- Many people with PCOS **do not have ovarian cysts**
- The “cysts” seen on scans are actually **immature follicles**
- Ultrasound findings alone **do not diagnose PCOS**

This confusion often leads to delayed diagnosis or symptoms being dismissed.

PCOS is a whole-body condition

PCOS affects more than periods and fertility. It is associated with higher risk of:

- Type 2 diabetes
- High cholesterol
- Fatty liver disease
- High blood pressure
- Sleep problems
- Anxiety and depression

These risks can exist **even in young people or those who are not overweight.**

Why lifestyle support matters

Because insulin resistance and stress hormones play a major role, PCOS often responds well to:

- Regular meals with adequate protein
- Gentle, consistent physical activity
- Strength-based exercise
- Adequate sleep
- Stress reduction

Small, sustainable changes are usually more effective than extreme diets or exercise plans.

Key messages for patients

PCOS is:

- **✗** Not caused by laziness or poor choices
- **✗** Not “just” a fertility issue
- **✗** Not something people did to themselves

PCOS is:

- A real medical condition
- Common and treatable
- Highly individual

Being believed and supported improves outcomes.

And Finally

I hope you've enjoyed this Lifestyle as Medicine newsletter. Looking at how small changes can have a key effect on health has certainly inspired me. My key change was possibly walking a 'very brisk mile' every day during lockdown. Gone was the stroll that I took, pretending it was exercise for me as well as the dog. Instead, I set off at a spanking pace along the road, determined to improve my times. It wasn't long before I felt fitter and slept better.

And as for PCOS, polycystic ovarian syndrome- my clinical practice is changing as from now. It is so often seen as a common condition that doesn't require medical intervention unless infertility is a problem. Yet small lifestyle changes in this condition can have real, lasting benefits.

What small changes will you make, either to your lifestyle or your clinical practice? Let me know, or post it in the WhatsApp group.

Jen

References

[BBC Radio 4 - Just One Thing - with Michael Mosley - Downloads](#)

[Polycystic ovary syndrome | Health topics A to Z | CKS | NICE](#) (NICE No. 1 recommendation is Lifestyle Management)

[3 Simple Lifestyle Tweaks Can Add a Year to Your Life](#)

Disclaimer: The information provided in this newsletter is for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended as medical advice. Always consult with a qualified healthcare provider before making any changes to your diet, exercise routine, or health care regimen. The content shared here is based on current research and best practices in lifestyle medicine, but individual needs and conditions may vary. The author is not responsible for any adverse effects or consequences resulting from the use of any suggestions, preparations, or procedures discussed in this newsletter. Jen West

Back issues of newsletter available. Please ask if you would like any of these.

26 Lifestyle Messages for Healthcare Workers

1. Lifestyle medicine is Core medicine