

Transcript for The Who's Dat Phat Girl Podcast - With Brooke Hoover
Episode 3 - A PHAT Girl Living with PCOS (Poly Cystic Ovarian Syndrome)

Hey y'all, I'm Brooke Hoover. A Louisiana native, actor, writer and comedian. I've lost 100 pounds through diet and exercise or shall I say "lifestyle changes". My twenty year and counting health journey has taught me that just like taking a diet pill for weight loss, body positivity doesn't magically happen overnight. I'm working on re-gaining my self esteem and re-kindling my love affair with Cajun and Southern comfort food in a healthier way all the while juggling eating as clean as I can, re-establishing myself in the entertainment industry which, as we know, is historically fat phobic all the while showing my inner phat girl some love - that's phat with a PH - pretty hot and tempting. Let me tell y'all a tale or two...

Hey y'all it's Brooke with the Who's Dat Phat Girl Podcast and today we're talking about something I know all too well. It's called PCOS aka Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome. And, I felt like I should let y'all know about this in my earlier on episodes because this is kind of how the weight gain all happened or how the weight gain with me just got even worse. PCOS, the way I describe it, and the way a doctor described it to me with the weight situation, it's like a double-edged sword. It's like what came first? The chicken or the egg? The PCOS or the weight gain? So, let's dive into that, all right.

So, Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, a lot of people think, "oh it means you have cysts on your ovaries and it's a gyno issue." It's not really that in fact. Something overpowering that is the endocrine system. The metabolic system. So, you have and by you I mean me or 10% of the other ladies out there who have PCOS. It's not super, super common. I don't think 6 to 10 % of the female population is a common number. You have insulin resistance. Your body's producing too much insulin. Right? Your pancreas is like on overdrive and hence...oh hence I feel smart - hence your ovaries are producing too much testosterone. Therefore you're going to have a lot of OBGYN related issues. Such as abnormal periods or absence of periods completely. Really heavy periods or super light periods. Super irregular periods. You may have PMDD, which is premenstrual dysphoric disorder that's something I have which is basically, for me at least I'll explain my personal definition. Is I become a crazy, crazy beast around my period and it feels like something else inhabits me and I cannot control it. I'm working on it. I've been working on it for [sing song voice] decades. Something else that is a big association with PCOS is being overweight and the way a doctor once described it to me once I found out I have PCOS, I said, 'Well is that why I'm fat?' And, she, I was hoping she would make me feel better. She's like, "No. Not exactly. The fact that you're fat makes you more predisposed to getting PCOS and then once you have PCOS it makes it harder for you to lose weight." Yay. Also other symptoms. Yes, there's more: infertility, acne, also thank God knock on wood oh God I'm knocking on wood cause my hair is like my signature loss of hair on your scalp but growth of hair on your face. Or other parts of your body where you don't want hair.

So, imagine getting all of these kind of symptoms right when I was 14 years old. So, I had my first period when I was 13 and it was I mean I was pretty much normal. But, I seemed to kind of really blimp up, if you will, right when puberty started happening. And it just started snowballing and snowballing and snowballing and getting worse. And, the fat that I carried and this is a sign of PCOS is like an inner tube. It's around your middle section in a way that looks like you're almost wearing an inner tube. Right? That's a sign of insulin resistance as far as I know.

And, I should stop for a second and let everybody know this: I'm not a doctor. I don't yet play one of TV. [Singsong voice] I would like to. I'm an actor. Right? So don't take my advice as Bible as the Kardashians would say. Don't come back and hit me with a lawsuit, please. Please I pray to Jesus y'all don't do that. If you're experiencing Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, go talk to your doctor. On that note, they way they detect it; oh the way they detect it because for me, for so long it went undetected is with blood work. Usually if you have all these symptoms, they can kind of look at you and say, "Oh you're a prime candidate. Let's do some blood work." Like they'll test your A1C, fasting glucose, your testosterone levels, all that fun stuff. So, I went from being a pretty skinny kid to like this chubby pubescent girl, then I started my period and things were like a little normal with the menstruation. But, I started developing some very extra sexy facial hair along with my inner tube of fat. And, this is where it gets vulnerable because I mean I'm born female and female identifying. I took a lot of shame with that. So, I spent a lot of time getting waxed, eventually getting laser hair removal which hurt like crazy, y'all. Hurts like crazy. I don't care what people say. And, electrolysis which actually for me it didn't hurt quite as bad as laser hair removal maybe because the lady who does my electrolysis is really nice. And, nowadays I have bought my own home electrolysis machine. Cause I'm crazy and cause Sharper Image was having a Black Friday sale. That's the hair.

And, the double-edged sword with the weight gain, the weight loss. This was back in the 90s when Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome wasn't really talked about that much. It's not like people really knew about it, right? So, my mom actually is a very wonderful Doctor Mom. She used to be a medical assistant. She worked as a activities director at a nursing home so she has worked in the medical field technically. But, first and foremost, she's doctor mom. She says to one of my doctors, "Look. Maybe this kid has a slow thyroid. Let's test her thyroid." So, you have to test a thyroid with blood work. I hate needles. I'm more used to them now because I've been poked and prodded so many times. But, as a child, I was terrified. So, I was about 13 or 14 and it was right around Thanksgiving break. And, we had to go in that morning. I was fasting. And, I'm just freaking out. And, my mom says, "Here, take like this little bit of my Xanax." So, my mom gives me a Xanax to calm me down. Instead of calming me down, the Xanax made me completely nuts and then I screamed and yelled and became the Tasmanian Devil for about 30 minutes and then I passed out and I spent the four days watching "Party of Five" marathons.

So, we never figured out at least at that time if something was off with my thyroid. But, here's the deal: my mom was on the very, very, very right track because thyroid

is your endocrine system. That is part of it. It is I guess like it's a family tree. The endocrine family. And, your thyroid and your insulin resistance and your testosterone and your ovaries, all of that falls underneath it, right? So, it is a system and my mom was thinking in a good way. And, then I just kept battling on through high school with these issues. I danced. I did theatre. I tried to lose weight. I just wasn't. I kept blowing up. And, my sideburns kept getting bigger. I remember being on Senior Cruise and this one guy who I thought was my friend, I mean we used to make fun of other people. He looks over at me and he starts making fun of me. And, he calls me, "Hey Sideburn Lady." Which is actually from an Adam Sandler movie. I think it's "Happy Gilmore" or "Billy Madison". I forget which one. I actually really like Adam Sandler movies. But, at that moment, I was like Adam Sandler. I hate you. And, to the guy who did this, I won't say his name, I was like, "I hate you, too. That's rude." I was going through the process of having laser hair removal at this time. I still hadn't been diagnosed with PCOS yet.

So, I go off to college. My first year of college. And people don't really make fun of me. Because, something I love about New York and being in the theatre department is that everybody's really weird. So, this 250-pound, frizzy haired Cajun girl with sideburns was not super awkward in the grand scheme of things. Right? I wasn't like this monster like this trashy from Fraggles Rock. Actually the Trashy was really awesome.

So, it was my sophomore year of college, my mom calls me up one day [in Momma's voice] "Baby, I think I've diagnosed you." And, now mind y'all, this was back in the day and my mom had actually been living in North Carolina at the time. She's living in the mountains. So, she has dial up. This is dial up Internet. Internet was just like a thing. So, I don't think WebMD was really existing at this point. But, she basically was like, [in Momma's voice] "I combine all these websites and I think I know what you have. I think it's something called PCOS. And, I found this really great doctor. She's an endocrinologist in Asheville and her name is Dr. Wendy Lane." So, when I was home for summer break, we went to Dr. Lane and I remember just crossing fingers like I pray we know what's up with me.

So, Doctor Lane, I walk in and she looks at me. She's this tiny, tiny woman and I'm this huge 5'8" 250 pound girl and my hair adds a good two to three inches to me. And, she just starts looking at me like a science experiment. Touching me, poking me, prodding me. Now, mind y'all, at this point, I'd never really been around doctors that much. I shied away from them. Dr. Greg, our pediatrician growing up, I would just run away from him and hide from him. I was very intimidated by doctors because they always made me feel guilty for being fat. For being overweight like it was my fault. So, I really shied away from them.

So, Doctor Lane's poking me, prodding me and she's looking at me saying, "Yes. Yes. You definitely have it. You definitely have PCOS." And, we hadn't done the labs yet but she's like even without the labs, I know. So, for the lab work what they test is, they test your A1C. They test your fasting glucose. They test your testosterone. They

test your obviously your cholesterol too because that's tied into the whole metabolic panel, et cetera. They run the gamut. And, Doctor Lane did a whole physical on me. Got very up close and personal with me. I did not like it. I don't know many people who would. But, there was at least hope you know that maybe we could balance things out because essentially, I should get to the point, PCOS is a hormonal imbalance. And, you want to balance things out, right?

So, we're driving home and home at the time was my mom's house in the mountains of North Carolina because that is where she moved from Louisiana. So, she goes from like below sea level to like 6,000 feet above sea level. Right? We're cruising and there's this area where there's like a farm. And, they are slaughtering a pig on the side of the road basically. And, I told my mom, I was like, "Pull over." You know? Yes. I eat meat. I don't eat pork. But, being called Miss Piggy and Oinker and Pig my whole life, I just felt something very symbolic about that pig being slaughtered. Right there on the side of the road for everyone to see. Right after this doctor had just man handled me like a science experiment. And, my mom pulled over because I basically had to throw up and crap my pants at the same time.

Luckily. Luckily for all of us, we were just around the corner from my house and you could later smell bacon in the air. That was disgusting. I still, to this day can't really eat pork products. But, so Dr. Lane called the next day and my levels were all out of whack and she prescribed several things: Metformin. Metformin is what they give diabetic patients because they want to regulate that insulin resistance. So, something with PCOS is you want to make sure you don't get Diabetes Type 2. Which my dad has. We will talk to him on a later podcast. You also need to regulate those androgens. The male hormones. So, they gave me Spironolactone for that to regulate the facial hair. She prescribed Vaniqa, which was a cream you could put on after the laser treatments or the waxing to help the facial hair growth topically. She also put me on birth control to regulate my periods. And, she also prescribed me Meridia, which is a weight loss drug.

So, I went back to college with all of these prescriptions. I was like, "Yay, we're gonna fix things. It's gonna be a miracle." It was not a miracle. The Meridia made me crazy. What I ended up doing was selling it to some of my friends because they wanted to stay up and study so it was a win-win, I guess? The Metformin was the most gentle of all of the drugs. The birth control worked. And, I didn't really notice an effect with anything. For a while, things were regulated. But, I wasn't really losing weight. I was able to have periods. So, that's good. But, the big thing and it's not just a vanity thing. When you are overweight, it's not just about how you look. It's about how you feel. There's a whole lot that goes on. I wanted to lose the weight. I just wanted to lose it and I wanted to know why there literally was no magic pill for it because Meridia sure as hell was not a magic pill. But, I graduated from college and I moved to Brooklyn so I started walking more so I think definitely the exercise helps. And, that is a known medical fact. Exercise helps everything. I condone exercise. Exercise definitely does help people with PCOS manage their symptoms. You do not want to over exercise because you don't want to raise that testosterone

too much but by all means, 30 minutes a day: walking is wonderful, yoga, Pilates, dance. I love dancing. Ah all that wonderful stuff is great.

And, my momma calls me one day, again, Doctor Mom and she's like [Momma's voice] "Baby, I think I found the right diet for you and it's not a diet. It's a lifestyle. It's called the South Beach Diet. "And, my mom doesn't really talk like that but in my head that's how her voice sounds. So, basically the South Beach diet was the precursor to what everyone's doing nowadays. it's basically limited the carbs because especially for PCOS, you want to limit those carbs especially the simple carbs because that effects your insulin production. The insulin resistance factor, right? So, I had some great friends who really got on board with me. We made a lot of stuffed peppers that year where you basically get a stuffed pepper and stuff it with brown rice and meat and other peppers. Things like that. I stopped eating bread. I stopped eating pasta. I stopped drinking juice. I stopped drinking soda. And, that made such a big change. Now, this whole podcast is all about PCOS. We will start getting more nitty and gritty about all the weight loss and things like that but finding that balance is what it's really all about, right?

So, I have lost some of the weight, right? We're going back. Back track, in Brooklyn, lost some of the weight. I'm on the medications. And, then one day, my doctor has just put me on a new, a different birth control. I'm crossing the street in Brooklyn getting out of the subway and I fall and faint. I just faint in the middle of the street. And, I read that that is one of the side effects of this new birth control. So, I call my doctor who is still back in North Carolina, Dr. Lane. And, I say to her, "Hey. So, I don't think this birth control's for me. In fact I don't want to be on any of these pills for the rest of my life." And, she's like, "We're you're gonna have to. You're just gonna have to kind of suck it up and deal with it." Is basically what she said and I paraphrase but I'm not really paraphrasing that much.

And, that's when I said, "Screw this medication. How can I do it naturally?" And, that was around the time I found a really great practitioner. I moved from Brooklyn to Jersey City where I now live and she is still my general practitioner to this day. I told her, I said, "I want to go off all these meds. What do I do?" So, I found a naturopath to work in conjunction with my general practitioner. Now, mind y'all. I'm on an actor's budget. Naturopaths are not covered by insurance. They really should be. And, they're very, very expensive. I think she was at least \$350 and this was 15 years ago.

So, they run the gamut. They want to know every single bit of your blood work. So, working with a naturopath, I got on a lot of herbs. Things like Vitex AKA Chaste Berry. That helps regulate your menstrual cycle basically and the production of everything holistically. As does oh my gosh what's it called? Evening Primrose Oil. So, basically I've been on a cocktail of herbs for nearly two decades and knock on wood, my periods are regular. I've lost 100 pounds since when I first saw Dr. Lane as the science experiment. And, the emotional symptoms of PCOS still remain. I'm actually very proud of myself. I just started therapy. About a week ago. So, I'm in therapy finally for that. I definitely condone acupuncture. I'm in acupuncture for

that. I have my home electrolysis kit from the Sharper Image, which I have yet to use because it was on sale at Black Friday and I actually have an electrolysis lady - I think they're called electrologists (?) around the corner who just opened up. She was closed because of the pandemic.

So, it's like if you have PCOS or if you have any syndrome that you're going to be living with for the rest of your life, have a tool kit. I shared my tool kit with y'all. Have a tool kit. Have people who will support you, medical team that doesn't make you feel guilty that doesn't make you feel like crap. If a doctor makes you feel like crap, get a new one. Okay? Because there are people out there who will help you, who will understand. And, if they don't, private message, message me contactbrookehoover@gmail.com and I will help you find a good doctor in your area. I promise, promise, promise you that because I don't think anybody should ever be made to feel like crap by a doctor because we're all here to just live and life a healthy life.

I hope me sharing my tale of Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome and how I manage it along with managing all the symptoms that go with it primarily the weight issue. I hate to be like "weight issue". The weight loss. the weight gain. The weight of PCOS. Thanks so much for listening.

Now, remember I'm not a doctor. I don't yet play one on TV. I hope to one day. So, don't take my advice as Bible or anything other than a girl sharing her experience with y'all. A phat girl. Remember, as always, that's phat with a PH.

Thanks so much for listening, y'all. It is my hope to inspire, uplift and entertain you with this Who's Dat Phat Girl podcast. So, if you're HUNGRY for more, you can book me to speak or perform my solo show that inspired this podcast Phat Girl Costumes written by yours truly and directed by my best bud Brian Lady at your virtual or in person event. Please visit Brookehoover.com/fluffybuttproductions or email me at contactbrookehoover@gmail.com for more information. And, let's follow each other on instagram - I'm @Br00keH00ver and those O's are not the letter O but they're ZEROS. Not because I want to be a size 0 but because I guess I'm just so clever with my late 90s Yahoo! self

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