
What Is Gout?

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Gout is a very painful type of arthritis. A person with gout will have sudden attacks that come back. The extreme pain, swelling and redness are due to crystals of a chemical called, 'uric acid', that collect in the joints. The body makes uric acid, but some foods can increase the amount of it and they should be avoided. The foods to be avoided are called 'high purine' foods.

Gout usually affects the joints in the big toe, ankles, feet, knee, wrist and hand. Over time, the crystals can cause damage to the inside of the joint, and can also cause kidney stones.

WHO GETS GOUT?

- Mostly men over age 40
- Persons with family history of gout
- Overweight people
- Women after menopause

DIAGNOSIS

- Blood and/or urine tests to check uric acid level
- Examination of joint fluids for uric acid crystals

SYMPTOMS

- Sudden and severe pain in the affected joint(s) most often in the big toe.
- Swelling and redness of the affected joint

An acute gout attack usually lasts a few days and may not recur for weeks or years. However, future attacks can become more frequent and severe, lasting for several weeks, and involve more joints.

TRIGGERS OF GOUT ATTACKS

- Excessive alcohol consumption (alcohol increases uric acid in the body)
- Obesity
- Diuretics ('water pills'), a common treatment for high blood pressure. Do not stop taking your diuretic medicine; always consult your physician regarding medication changes.
- Stress of an injury (surgery or fracture)
- Rapid weight loss

TREATMENT

In an acute gout attack, the drug COLCHICINE and non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) such as INDOMETHACIN and IBUPROFEN are often prescribed to relieve symptoms. For those who are unable to tolerate oral anti-inflammatory drugs, steroid injections may be given.

Chronic gout sufferers may need to take drugs that stop production of uric acid (such as ALLOPURINOL) or promote excretion of uric acid (such as PROBENECID). Aspirin inhibits the removal of uric acid and should never be used for the treatment of gout. A low purine diet may be prescribed along with medications to lower blood uric acid level.

PREVENTION OF RECURRENT GOUT ATTACKS

- Avoid beer, wine and other fermented alcoholic drinks.
- Drink 8-12 cups of water a day. If you have high blood pressure, heart disease, or take a 'water pill' or diuretic, talk with your doctor first.
- The following high purine foods are known to cause a gout attack or make gout worse: shellfish (shrimp, clams, crab, lobster, mussels, scallops), sardines, meat broth, large amounts of pork or beef, organs meats (brain, kidney, liver, sweetbreads, tongue), dried beans peas, asparagus, spinach and mushrooms.
- Wear shoes that protect your toes. Hitting your toes can cause a gout attack.
- When prescribed, take your medication as instructed to prevent gout attacks.

For more information on gout, please contact your physician or the Arthritis Foundation at 1-800-283-7800 or www.arthritis.org

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