

What is Gout?



Gout is a form of arthritis which can affect anyone usually among the middle aged group (approximately around 40 - 60 years of age). It is characterized by sudden, severe attacks of pain, redness and tenderness in joints usually starting at the joint on the base of the big toe. However, gout can affect other joints in any part of the body. An acute attack of gout can wake you up in the middle of the night with the sensation that your big toe is on fire. The affected joint is hot, swollen and so tender that even the weight of a light blanket on it may seem intolerable. Fortunately, gout is treatable, and there are ways to reduce the likelihood of its recurrence.



Symptoms of Gout

The signs and symptoms of gout are almost always acute, occurring suddenly — often at night — and without warning.

They include:

Intense joint pain. Gout usually affects the large joint of your big toe, but it can occur in your feet, ankles, knees, hands and wrists. The pain is likely to be most severe within the first 12 to 24 hours after it begins.

Lingering discomfort. After the most severe pain subsides, some joint discomfort may last from a few days to a few weeks. Later attacks are likely to last longer and affect more joints.

Inflammation and redness. The affected joint or joints become swollen, tender and red. ■

Causes of Gout

Gout is caused by too much **uric acid** in the blood which forms hard crystals in the joints leading to pain.

Uric acid is a chemical created when the body breaks down substances called purines. **Purines** are found in some foods and drinks, such as liver, anchovies, mackerel, dried beans and peas and beer.

Most uric acid dissolves in blood and travels to the kidneys, where it passes out in urine. If your body produces too much uric acid or doesn't remove enough of it, then you are likely to develop illnesses such as gout. ■

Treating Gout

Medications are the most proven, effective way to treat gout symptoms. However, making certain changes to your diet also may help.

The American Dietetic Association recommends following these guidelines during a gout attack:

- Drink 8 to 16 cups (about 2 to 4 liters) of fluid each day, with at least half being water.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Eat a moderate amount of protein, preferably from healthy sources, such as low-fat or fat-free dairy, tofu, eggs, and nut butters.
- Limit your daily intake of meat, fish and poultry to 4 to 6 ounces (about 2 cups).
- Try alternative but medically-subscribed treatments to help you cope until your gout pain subsides. Relaxation techniques such as deep-breathing exercises and meditation may help take your mind off the pain. ■

Risk Factors of Gout



- 1. Lifestyle factors.** Too much alcohol consumption — generally more than two drinks a day for men and more than one for women — increases the risk of gout.
- 2. Diet.** Drinking too much of sugar-sweetened drinks that are high in fructose as well as eating too much purine-rich foods such as organ meats (e.g. kidney, heart, etc.). Eating more than the regular amount of sea foods like mackerel, herring, sardines and mussels, and foods containing yeast

such as beer, baked goods, soy sauce and cheese.

- 3. Medical conditions.** People with certain conditions have an increased risk of developing gout. These include: obesity, high blood pressure, kidney damage, diabetes, bone marrow disorders, lipid disorders, and vascular disease.
- 4. Family history of gout.** If other members of your family have had gout, you're more likely to develop the same disease as you get older.
- 5. Age and sex.** Gout occurs more often in men than it does in women, primarily because women tend to have lower uric acid levels than men. After menopause, however, women's uric acid levels approach those of men. Men also are more likely to develop gout earlier — usually between the ages of 40 and 50 — whereas women generally develop signs and symptoms after menopause. ■

People with gout are advised to maintain a diet which is:

- high in complex carbohydrates (fiber-rich whole grains, fruits, and vegetables)
- low in protein (15% of calories and sources should be soy, lean meats, or poultry)
- and contains no more than 30% of calories in fat (with only 10% animal fats).

Gout Friendly Foods



Preventing Gout

During symptom-free periods, these dietary guidelines may help protect against future gout attacks:

- 1. Keep your fluid intake high.** Aim for 2 to 4 liters of fluid each day, with at least half being water. Limit how many sweetened beverages you drink, especially those with high fructose corn syrup.
- 2. Limit or avoid alcohol.** Beer increases the risk of gout symptoms, especially in men.
- 3. Eat a balanced diet.** Your daily diet should emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk products.
- 4. Get your protein from low-**

fat dairy products. Low-fat dairy products like 1% or low fat milk, soy milk, and natural plain yogurt, and non-fat cheese may actually have a protective effect against gout, so these are your best protein sources.

- 5. Limit your intake of meat, fish and poultry.** A small amount may be tolerable, but pay close attention to what types — and how much — seem to cause problems for you.

- 6. Maintain a desirable body weight. Choose portions that allow you to maintain a healthy weight.** Losing weight may decrease uric acid levels in your body. But avoid fasting or rapid weight loss, since doing so may temporarily raise uric acid levels. ■