

Gout

What is gout?

Gout is a kind of arthritis caused by too much uric acid in the joints. Uric acid is a substance that forms when your body breaks down waste products called purines. This substance normally dissolves in your blood and passes through your kidneys into your urine. In people with gout, uric acid builds up and forms sharp crystals that can collect around the joints. This causes pain and swelling in the affected joints.

Who can get gout?

If you eat a lot of foods that are rich in purines, you may get gout. Some of these foods are salmon, sardines, liver and herring.

You may get gout if you're overweight, drink alcohol or have high cholesterol. Men have gout more often than women do. Women are more likely to have gout after menopause.

Some medicines may cause gout, such as certain diuretics ("water pills"), niacin (a B-complex vitamin), aspirin (taken in low doses), cyclosporine (brand names: Sandimmune, Neoral, SangCya) and some drugs used to treat cancer.

What is a gout attack like?

It may be sudden. It usually starts at night, often in the big toe. The affected joint becomes red, feels hot and hurts. The joint hurts more when you touch it. Other joints may also be affected.

What should I do if I have a gout attack?

The sooner you get treatment, the sooner the pain will go away. Your doctor can prescribe medicine to stop the joint swelling and pain.

You should rest in bed. Putting a hot pad or an ice pack on the joint may ease the pain. Keeping the weight of clothes or bedding off the joint can also help.

With treatment, your gout attack should go away in a few days. You may never have another attack.

What if I don't get treatment?

If you don't get treatment, a gout attack can last for days or even weeks. If you keep having more attacks, more joints will be affected, and the attacks will last longer.

If you have gout attacks for many years, you may develop tophi (say "toe-fee"). These are soft tissue swellings caused by uric acid crystals. Tophi usually form on the toes, fingers, hands and elbows. You may also get kidney disease or kidney stones. Over time, the bone around a joint may be destroyed by gout.

What can I do to avoid gout attacks?

Your doctor can prescribe medicines to prevent future gout attacks. These medicines can wash the uric acid from your joints, reduce swelling or keep uric acid from forming.

You should lose weight if you are overweight. If you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol, get treatment and follow a low-salt, low-fat diet.

Stay away from alcohol and foods that are high in purines. Drink lots of water. It can help flush uric acid from your body.

We used to prescribe a low purine diet, but the diet is not as frequently used. A low purine diet omits organ meats like liver, kidney, sweetbreads, brains, meat gravies and extracts, sardines, anchovies, herring, mackerel, scallops and most wild game. The following foods are allowed once per day: meat; fish; poultry; dried beans and peas; asparagus; mushrooms; cauliflower; spinach.

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DISCUSSION: GOUT - is a form of arthritis which occurs more frequently in men and is often hereditary . It is generally caused by increased amounts of uric acid in the blood stream which may be deposited as crystals in the tissue, organs, ligaments, tendons, or in the joints. Gout can result from certain drugs, such as diuretics. The joints (the big toe, instep, ankle, and knees), are often affected in the early stages of gout. Purines, chemicals that are found in high concentrations in liver, kidney, sweetbreads, and sardines, are broken down into uric acid. The person with gout does not metabolize purines well, which allows a build up of uric acid in the blood stream. Eliminating foods containing purines will not lower the uric acid level, since the body also produces chemicals forming uric acid. Acute attacks of gout usually present with pain, inflammation, and swelling. Patients in which the acute attacks have not been severe may not require medication for the prevention of gout, but can usually be maintained with the general instructions outlined below. People who may benefit from therapy generally have the following: 1. Visible uric acid deposits (tophi); 2. Increased serum uric acid levels; 3. Urate deposits visible on x-ray; 4. More than four major acute gout attacks within a year.

TREATMENT: Treatment of gout involves the provision of relief in an acute attack and the prevention of further attacks. Bedrest is indicated during an acute attack. The use of a cradle or bed frame will be beneficial to help keep the linens off the painful joint. Eat a well-balanced diet that does not contain any liver, kidney, sweetbreads, or sardines. Increase the fluid in your diet to incorporate 8 - 10 glasses of water a day, as this will decrease your chance of forming kidney stones. Avoid any alcoholic beverages and cigarette smoking. Warm or cool compresses will help decrease the pain in the affected joint. Gout can be treated very effectively with medication. Colbenemid is a medication useful if urinary excretion of uric acid is <800 mg/d. Allopurinol helps if excretion is >800 mg/d.

NOTIFY US FOR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING: 1. Persistent diarrhea or vomiting; 2. Fever above 101 F.; 3. Skin rash; 4. Sore throat, red tongue, or increased bleeding from the gums; 5. No improvement in three days.

This information is brief, incomplete and is not intended as specific individual advice.