

Take a Stand on Gout

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers about Gout

Why do some people get gout?

It is not fully understood why certain people are more prone to gout. Risk factors for gout include:

- High levels of uric acid in the blood
- Kidney disease
- High blood pressure (hypertension)

- Diabetes
- Obesity
- High cholesterol
- Heart disease
- Family history of gout
- Ethnicity
- Gender

Some people with high uric acid levels will never get gout, while others will experience painful and frequent attacks.

Is there a special diet for patients with gout?

A well-balanced, healthy diet is recommended for those suffering from gout.

Fruits, vegetables, lean proteins such as chicken and fish, and low-fat dairy products are most often recommended.

Foods that contain purines are known to raise uric acid levels. Limit your consumption of the following. Avoid them completely if you have an attack.

- Limit red meat, lamb, pork and organ meats, shellfish, shrimp, lobster and sardines.
- Limit beer, grain alcohol, wine, sweet fruit juices and soft drinks.
- Avoid products that contain high-fructose corn syrup.

Is there a cure for gout?

Unfortunately, gout is a disease that requires lifelong attention and treatment. With continued effort, gout is manageable. Medication to manage pain and control uric acid, plus physical activity and a healthy diet, can help you return to your regular quality of life.

Are alternative, non-medical remedies safe and effective?

There are many myths concerning gout treatment. Drinking cherry juice is a popular one, but cherry juice plays no significant role in controlling acute gout flares. Cherry juice and some other fruits contain ascorbic acid, which is an anti-inflammatory and can cause a small drop in uric acid levels. Unfortunately, consuming large quantities of cherry juice or other foods or beverages containing ascorbic acid will simply not be enough for most patients to relieve the pain or reach the target uric acid level of 6.0 mg/dL or below.

What joints can gout affect?

Gout affects the big toe in 50 percent of all first attacks. It can also affect the middle of the foot, ankle, knee, wrist and elbow. An attack may not always occur in the same joint each time. The pain could be in the big toe during the first attack and then in the knee or other joints in later attacks.

Men often experience gout flares in the lower extremities. Women are more likely to experience flares in the upper extremities.

How do I know if I have gout and not another form of arthritis?

A medical professional will conduct an exam, and discuss your symptoms and health history. He or she will ask you about the location of the pain, how much it hurt and how long it lasted. You will want to share any other health or lifestyle factors that may have changed lately. You may

be given a simple blood test to determine your uric acid level. Most patients receive a diagnosis based on these factors and treatment can begin.

Some patients may also have fluid drawn from the affected joint. It will be examined under a special microscope to look for the crystals that result from too much uric acid in the body, and this will confirm a diagnosis of gout. This procedure to diagnose gout is less common and generally done by a specialist.

Why do women experience gout differently?

Women do not typically develop gout until after menopause. Estrogen levels may offer protection throughout most of a woman's adult life. Post-menopausal women may have high levels of uric acid, and develop uric acid crystal deposits in joints that can cause damage.

What are the risks if I don't get treatment?

The risks are real. Gout does not go away. If untreated, the length and severity of attacks will become worse and more frequent over time. In addition to excruciating pain, untreated gout can result in deformities and disability.

Uric acid crystals can even accumulate in unusual places such as heart valves or the spinal cord, causing other significant medical problems. Pain management and urate-lowering therapy are of vital importance to successfully living with gout.

For more information, talk to your doctor or visit GoutEducation.org

