

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & 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 flares.

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 – chemicals that increase the amount of uric acid in the blood – are known to raise uric acid levels, and should be limited in order to avoid frequent flares. It's also important to limit your consumption of food and beverages that contain high-fructose corn syrup, which is also known to spike uric acid levels.

Limit your consumption of the following. Avoid them completely if you have a flare.

- Red meat, lamb, pork and organ meats, shellfish, shrimp, lobster and sardines.
- Beer, grain alcohol, wine, sweet fruit juices and soft drinks.
- Sugary cereals, store-bought baked goods
- Ice cream and candy
- Processed foods

While those with gout are encouraged to follow a healthy and balanced diet, proper gout management also includes taking steps – beyond

diet – to lower uric acid levels to 6.0 mg/dL or below. Talk to your doctor or dietitian to find out how diet plays a role in your gout treatment plan.

IS THERE A CURE FOR GOUT?

Unfortunately, gout is a lifelong disease that requires ongoing attention and treatment once diagnosed. However, with continued effort, gout is manageable and, over time, all symptoms may disappear. 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.

However, some people may have difficulty reaching their target uric acid level even if they are taking a uric acid-lowering medication and making necessary lifestyle changes. In these hard-to-treat cases, your doctor may recommend a combination of medications that work together to help reduce uric acid levels.

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 and anthocyanins, which can help lessen pain and modestly lower 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.

In most cases, people with gout must take uric acid-lowering medications on an ongoing basis in order to successfully reach their target level.

WHAT JOINTS CAN GOUT AFFECT?

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

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. They 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, like new medications or changes in diet, which may impact diagnosis. 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 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 flares 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, which can cause 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

