

MEDICAL ADVICE FOR PATIENTS WITH GOUT

Gout is a lifelong disease that requires immediate attention and ongoing treatment once diagnosed. With proper medication and lifestyle modifications, many patients can gain excellent control of the disease and flares can become few and far between. Flares can even remain dormant for life with proper medical therapy and lifestyle changes. As with many other serious health conditions, early diagnosis and treatment are key. If left untreated, gout can cause permanent damage to your bones and joints that could limit your activities. Gout has also been linked to several serious health issues, including kidney stones/disease, diabetes, heart attack and stroke.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A GOUT FLARE?

A gout flare begins suddenly, often as a twinge in a joint which rapidly becomes hot and very painful. Men and women can sometimes experience gout differently. Gout classically affects joints of the lower extremities like the big toe, mid-foot, ankle, and knees. Women may also have flares in their fingers, wrists or elbows early on in their disease course. In both cases, the pain gets worse very fast. The affected area will become tender to the touch, swollen and red over a 12-hour period. If untreated, a gout flare will stay at an intense level of pain over several days and will gradually go away over a week or so. Low grade fever and feeling poorly are not unusual.

It's important to understand that it would be rare for your first flare to be the last.

When people first have flares of gout, they may only have a flare once in a while. It may only last for five to seven days. Most of the time, though, flares return. Once someone has two flares within a 12-month period, medical professionals generally recommend starting medication to lower the amount of uric acid in their body. Too much uric acid in the body is what sets the stage for a flare of gout.

Everyone with gout needs to know their current uric acid level and their goal level. A simple blood test can determine the level. It is recommended that gout patients "Go for Six" – meaning that they should have their serum uric acid level tested every six months and aim for a healthy level of 6.0 mg/dL or below.

Without regular monitoring of their condition and proper treatment, the pain and uncontrolled uric acid problems will worsen.

Over time, gout will go from being intermittently painful to being constantly painful. This stage is called Advanced Gout. The joints can become deformed and swollen, and patients will experience increasing and often chronic pain. Seeking medical care right away and following doctor's orders are important to prevent your gout from getting to the advanced stage.

Keep in mind that with the proper treatment, gout is manageable!

GOUT TREATMENT

Your doctor will focus on two types of treatment:

1. Pain management
2. Therapy to lower your uric acid level (urate-lowering therapy)

Pain Management for Gout Flares

Pain management is important, and is typically the first priority. There are many options for controlling pain. Sometimes over-the-counter drugs are used, but most often, prescription medications are needed to manage the excruciating pain of a flare. Pain management options include:

- Colchicine
- Glucocorticosteroids, like Prednisone and Medrol
- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, naproxen and indomethacin

It's worth noting that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends taking the lowest possible NSAID dose for the shortest duration of time to avoid serious cardiovascular

and gastrointestinal risks that have been linked with the use of NSAIDs. Based on existing health issues that could put you at higher risk for complications, you and your doctor can determine a low-dose pain medication that is right for you.

Medicine to lower uric acid

There are several drugs that help lower uric acid levels in the body. These are called urate-lowering therapies and include the following:

- Allopurinol
- Febuxostat
- Lesinurad
- Pegloticase
- Probenecid

Dosing is individualized. As with other medications, you may tolerate some combinations better than others. Let your doctor know of any unpleasant side effects. Adjustments to the dosage or type of medication can be made until the right treatment is in place.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

When patients first begin a urate-lowering medication, it is not unusual to have gout flares. They are a sign that the body is working to get rid of the extra uric acid. It is important to keep taking your medicine, and let your health care professional know so they can be sure you have something on hand to treat pain.

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.

Tell your doctor about all of your other medical problems and medications including over-the-counter products you take, including herbs, vitamins and supplements. Some medications can raise your uric acid level, while others may lower it.

