



WHO GETS GOUT AND WHY

WHAT IS GOUT?

Gout is a form of arthritis. It is a serious, lifelong disease that needs ongoing treatment and requires some changes to lifestyle habits to achieve control. People who have gout experience times of severe pain in one or more joints. The pain can come on quickly and is very intense and then begins to go away after several days. Unfortunately, most people who have gout will have another painful flare within a year. More than three out of four people will have another flare within two years.

Understanding the disease and following treatment advice from a medical professional are important. If left untreated, advanced gout can lead to the same level of work loss, physical disability and diminished quality of life as is seen in advanced rheumatoid arthritis.



Gout is one of the oldest known medical conditions and, in the past, was called the “disease of kings. It is historically associated with eating rich foods and

consuming a lot of alcohol, particularly beer. Over the past 30 years, the percentage of people developing gout has been steadily rising. People in industrial societies now have access to rich food, are not physically active and they live longer. Closely associated with this rise in gout has been a marked increase in the risk of people developing diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

WHAT IS URIC ACID AND WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO DO WITH GOUT?

Uric acid is naturally produced in everyone’s body. Too much of it can put people at risk for gout. As cells die, they release substances called purines, which are also found in some foods. Purines break down and are eliminated as uric acid. Uric acid passes mostly through the kidneys. If the body makes too much uric acid, or if the kidneys are not efficient in getting rid of it, hyperuricemia (high uric acid in the blood) develops. Hyperuricemia is necessary to develop gout.

Lowering uric acid to a healthy range – 6.0 mg/dL or below – is the most important step to successfully managing gout. Interestingly enough, not everyone with hyperuricemia will get gout, but once it develops, it is likely to return unless treated by medicine to lower uric acid.

Medication to lower your uric acid level and some changes to your diet and exercise habits can reduce the amount of uric acid you have.

After years of hyperuricemia, the extra uric acid in the body can turn into crystals in your joints and in other tissues. These crystals are what set the stage for a painful flare of gout. The crystals cause severe pain and swelling. The pain can be so strong that people often need to go to the emergency room for help.

WHO CAN GET GOUT?

Gout is most common among middle age to older men. First flares are seen between the ages of 40 and 55, although it can occur at any age. Women can get gout, but usually do not experience a flare until a decade or more after menopause.

Risk factors for gout are:

- High levels of uric acid in the blood
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- High lipids and heart disease
- Family history

Talk to your doctor about your overall health and health history. Discuss your family’s health history, too. All of this information is important in understanding how best to monitor and treat gout and other health conditions that may be part of the big picture of your health.

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

