

Gout uncovered

helpful information about gout

What is gout?

In simple terms, gout is best described as a form of arthritis that is associated with elevated levels of a natural waste product in the body, uric acid. Uric acid can build up in your bloodstream to very high levels and form urate crystals in your joints. The first attack is likely to be on a foot, or most commonly a big toe, and last for a period of days to a week or two only. The joint becomes red, swollen and very painful and you may even experience flu like symptoms. Sound familiar?



Foot of a patient suffering from gout

All of your joints, but most commonly the ankles, wrists, hands, elbows and knees, can be hit by a gout attack, especially if the joints have already been affected by arthritis. Subsequent attacks may include other joints and be longer lasting. Some people mistakenly believe they have suffered a sprain injury, when they are really having a prolonged gout attack. If left untreated, gout can turn into a crippling form of arthritis.



What should I do?

The good news is there are many steps you can take to effectively prevent and manage gout attacks. Gout is becoming more widespread and research is focused on uncovering more about the triggers and effective treatments. We know that there is a genetic link, so it's probably a good time to look at any relevant family history. Your doctor will also want to discuss any other existing conditions like high blood pressure, Type 2 diabetes and kidney disease as these are also linked with gout. Plus, gout is more common as you get older, especially in men over 40 years and post menopausal women.



Your doctor has given you this gout leaflet to assist you in learning how to better prevent and manage the painful condition called gout. Chances are you've already had some well meaning advice from family and friends. This leaflet will provide you with accurate and useful information.

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Karen Inge

Karen Inge
Accredited Practising Dietitian

Now, we all know you can't choose your parents or stop ageing, but you can focus on a healthy lifestyle that lowers uric acid levels in your blood. These tips may help:

Keep a healthy weight – being overweight can cause uric acid levels to rise, so talk with your doctor, or see an Accredited Practising Dietitian about a weight management plan. You need to be very careful not to go on a crash, fad or high animal protein weight loss diet as this can in fact raise uric acid levels even higher. Remember slow and steady wins the race with long-term weight loss.

Go easy on alcohol – drinking alcohol, especially binge drinking, can raise uric acid levels. It's a good idea to cut down on alcohol (no more than 2 standard drinks a day) and consider ceasing drinking during an attack. There is some debate about whether wine, beer or spirits are more likely to raise uric acid levels, but at this stage the evidence is that all forms of alcohol can be culprits.

Drink enough fluid – getting adequate fluid each day can help lower your risk of gout attack. Choose water as your main drink and try and clock up eight or more glasses (of approx. 250mL) of fluid a day.

Cut down on certain foods – there are many urban myths about what not to eat if you have gout. There is evidence that an attack can be triggered by foods and beverages high in fructose, as well as those rich in purines, both of which are converted in your body to uric acid.



Your doctor or a dietitian will advise you on the best eating plan to suit your health needs and lifestyle, that is also nutritionally balanced. In the meantime, try and avoid drinking fruit juice (which is high in fructose)

and soft drink (which is high in sugar - which is half fructose) and cut down on these foods rich in purines:

- Red meat*, poultry*
- Offal* – like liver, kidneys and heart
- Seafood* – particularly shellfish, scallops, mussels, herring, mackerel, sardines, anchovies.
- Yeast – found in foods like beer and Vegemite

Better sources of protein for people with gout are eggs, tofu, nuts and low fat dairy and grains like quinoa. Over time, you may learn to recognise which foods and drinks trigger an attack for you.

Get the balance right – your doctor may recommend that you see an accredited practising dietitian who will be able to advise you on the best eating plan tailored just for you. It's important to note that not all purine-rich foods cause gout in all people and more scientific research is becoming available

*limit to 120-180g per day

Further information

Arthritis Australia

> www.arthritisaustralia.com

Dietitians Association of Australia

> www.daa.asn.au

This factsheet is designed to be a resource on management of gout, in conjunction with seeing your health professional.

every day. For example, vegetables regardless of purine content may be protective as they may increase urate excretion. There is also evidence that including low fat dairy and vitamin C rich foods in your eating plan, may have health benefits. In conjunction with seeing your doctor, these tips may assist you to manage gout. Also, have a regular check in with your dietitian to hear the latest and greatest nutrition news.

Medical therapy

In an acute attack of gout, your doctor may prescribe medication to reduce the pain and inflammation. Once the acute attack has settled, your doctor may also prescribe a urate-lowering medication. You can focus on changes to your lifestyle to remove triggers that may have contributed to high levels of uric acid. Many people can successfully lower their risk of future attacks by following the tips in this fact sheet and getting a tailored plan for a healthy lifestyle. However, as gout is a condition that can increase in frequency and severity with aging you may experience further attacks. In some people uric acid levels are elevated due to a hereditary condition that causes overproduction by the body. Your doctor will advise if you require urate-lowering medicines for long-term use.

Where can I get help?

Doctor – see them first and regularly to discuss your symptoms and management plan.

Accredited Practising Dietitian – ask your doctor for a referral for tailored dietary advice. You can search for APDs in your area at www.daa.asn.au

Pharmacist – talk to them if you have questions about any of your prescribed medications.

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References: 1. Therapeutic Guidelines Rheumatology (version 2), 2010 (Therapeutic Guidelines Limited). 2. Weaver, A. Cleveland Clinical Journal of Medicine. Vol 75, Supp 5. July 2008. 3. Arthritis Information Sheet, Gout, Arthritis Australia. Accessed May 2011. 4. Hayman, S and Marcason, W Gout: is a purine-restricted diet still recommended? JADA Vol109 No9 1489-1652 2009. ©Copyright 2011 Karen Inge. This information for patients is provided by Aspen Pharmacare. It is of a general nature only and is not intended to replace any advice given to patients by their doctors or other healthcare professionals. Aspen Pharmacare Australia Pty Ltd. 32-36 Chandos St, St Leonards. NSW 2065. This patient information leaflet is available at www.aspenpharmacare.com.au in the Patient Resources section.