WANT FEWER OR NO GOUT ATTACKS?

THE KEY MAY BE A DIFFERENT CONVERSATION WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Are you one of the estimated 8.3 million adults in the U.S. affected by gout (sometimes called gouty arthritis)\(^1\)? If so, you know that gout attacks may occur without warning, may produce extreme pain, last hours or weeks, and limit your mobility.\(^2,4\)

Gout may be a manageable disease compared to other chronic diseases.\(^5\)

Half of gout patients have multiple attacks per year.\(^6\) If you are one of them, changing how you talk to your doctor about gout could be one way to help improve your care.

You and/or your doctor may sometimes give gout low priority during appointments compared to other conditions that may seem more serious.\(^5\) You may not tell your doctor about your gout attacks because you feel guilty, thinking that you might have caused them. But your doctor is your partner in managing gout and reducing the number of attacks you have. So talking honestly about gout with your doctor is important.

BETTER COMMUNICATIONS WITH YOUR DOCTOR COULD IMPROVE CARE

Research suggests the importance of good communication between health care professionals and patients. A doctor’s ability to explain, listen and empathize can greatly affect patient care and satisfaction and improve treatment adherence and doctor satisfaction with medical encounters.\(^7,9\)

To help enhance the quality of care, the Arthritis Foundation collaborated with Takeda Pharmaceuticals, who sponsored new research with gout patients and doctors to understand the language they use to talk about gout and to identify effective communications practices that could enhance gout management.
“LET’S SPEAK GOUT”  
RESEARCH REVEALS INSIGHTS ABOUT DOCTOR/PATIENT CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GOUT:

Many patients don’t bring up gout at their appointments even when they have been having multiple flares.
- “I don’t want to face my doctor. I want to keep my dignity. So I say everything is fine, even when I’ve been having flares. I feel like gout is my fault.”
- “I never bring [gout] up any more and neither does my doctor, even though I’m having flares and maybe there are new things I should try.”

Many gout patients don’t have a good understanding of gout.
- “Tell me why I got gout. Give me specifics. Don’t just say, ‘eat right and exercise.’”
- “I want to know why this is happening. I’m doing everything I’m supposed to.”

Many patients don’t know about uric acid, how it is measured or what the measurement means.
- “We need to understand the implications of high uric acid levels and what our goal should be.”
- “Why does my body make that uric acid?”
- “I don’t know what a ‘healthy level’ of uric acid is.”

Many patients don’t realize that genetics may contribute to their risk of gout.
- “I think gout is hereditary but I don’t know. Never been told that but my whole family has gout.”
- “If I were told this was in part genetic, it would be liberating. I wouldn’t blame myself all the time.”

Many patients don’t understand that unmanaged gout may have long-term consequences.
- “I did not know that gout could have a permanent impact on my joints.”
- “No one told me that having gout and high uric acid levels can have serious consequences.”
Based on these insights from the “Let’s Speak Gout” research, the following sections provide ideas for how you can change the way you talk to your doctor to help better manage gout.\(^5\)

WAYS TO CHANGE THE CONVERSATION AT YOUR NEXT APPOINTMENT

**DOCTOR:** We’ve checked and discussed your blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels. So, I’ll see you next time.

**PATIENT:** Actually, doc, I’d like to also discuss my gout. Can you check my uric acid level too? I want to see if it’s lower than last time. What is my target uric acid level?

**DOCTOR:** How’s your gout? Had any trouble since last time I saw you?

**PATIENT:** No. I’ve got it under control. If I have any problems, I just take some medicine for the pain and I’ll be fine.

**DOCTOR:** As long as you’ve got something to control your gout flare pain when needed, you should be ok.

**PATIENT:** I’m glad to have something for the gout flare pain but, what are the long-term effects of high uric acid levels? Do I need to keep it below a certain number?
### TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Talk about gout during each doctor visit. If you’re having attacks, talk about solutions. If you’re not, talk about what’s working well. Make a list of questions you want to ask at each visit.

- Keep a record of how many attacks you’ve experienced since your last visit and bring it to your appointment.

- Communicate honestly about how many attacks you’ve experienced since your last visit.

- Discuss the level of pain of each attack on a scale of 1 to 10, from mild discomfort to excruciating pain.

- Speak up if you are not happy with your current treatment; there may be other options.

- Ask for help with reducing purines in your diet. Your doctor may refer you to a nutritionist or recommend information sources, such as the Arthritis Foundation.

- Go to the Arthritis Foundation website, www.arthritis.org/lets-speak-gout, for more information and Let’s Speak Gout resources.

### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR

1. What causes gout?
2. What is happening in my body when I have gout?
3. What are the potential long-term consequences of gout for me?
4. How is uric acid connected to gout attacks?
5. Can you check my uric acid level?
6. What can I do to lower my uric acid level?
7. Do I need to make changes to my diet to lower my uric acid level?
8. Do I need medication to lower my uric acid level?
9. What are your gout treatment goals for me?
10. How will you monitor progress towards those goals?
11. How frequently will you test my uric acid levels?
12. What happens when I reach my uric acid target?
13. Besides controlling my uric acid level, what medications can I take for pain due to a gout attack?
ABOUT GOUT

GOUT IS A TYPE OF ARTHRITIS

Gout is a painful form of arthritis commonly found felt in a big toe. Gout is caused by a build up of uric acid in the blood that crystallizes in joints. This can cause inflammation and lead to painful gout attacks.

If uric acid levels in your body remain high over time, gout attacks can happen more often, last longer, and affect more than one joint. The most common place for a gout attack is the big toe, but they may occur in other joints, such as the ankle, knee, elbow or wrist.

GENETIC FACTORS MAY CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOUT

Gout is a chronic condition that has a genetic component. Many people with gout have a family history of the disease. In a study carried out in the United States, researchers found that more than 36% of participants with gout had a family history of it.

UNTREATED GOUT MAY HAVE LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

Gout can permanently damage your joints if not treated properly. Uric acid crystal deposits, called tophi, may form in and near your joints. This can cause them to become disfigured and limit movement.

Gout patients often have other comorbid conditions, including chronic kidney disease, heart disease, and diabetes. You may want to ask your doctor if there are other health issues that should be explored.

A HEALTHY URIC ACID LEVEL MAY HELP REDUCE OR ELIMINATE GOUT ATTACKS

What is Uric Acid?
The uric acid in your body comes from purines, substances that are naturally produced by your body and that are also found in many foods. People with gout have high uric acid levels because either they produce too much of it or because they have a difficult time getting rid of it.

How is Uric Acid Related to Gout Attacks?
Excess uric acid can form crystals in joints, which can cause inflammation and lead to painful gout attacks. The most effective way to reduce or stop these attacks is to work with your doctor to keep your uric acid at a healthy level. This may include following a low-purine diet and taking medication. For most patients, the target uric acid level is less than 6 mg/dL. Uric acid levels should be managed on an ongoing basis.

What Affects Uric Acid Levels?
While limiting alcohol and certain high-purine foods is important, diet changes alone may not be enough to maintain a healthy level of uric acid. Genetics plays a greater role than diet in your level of uric acid, based on how much your body is prone to produce. This is because about two-thirds of your uric acid is produced naturally by your body, while the other third comes from your diet. A low-purine diet lowers uric acid only by about 1 mg/dL. Uric acid lowering medication may be required.

How is Uric Acid Monitored?
Ask your doctor for a simple blood test to regularly check your uric acid level. A blood test will help you see if your uric acid level is above or below the goal of 6 mg/dL.
GOUT ATTACKS TRACKER

When you have a gout attack, print this tracker and record relevant details. Take it to your next doctor’s appointment to help you and your doctor identify patterns or triggers that might have caused the most recent attacks. Save all your Gout Attack Trackers for future reference.

DATE OF GOUT ATTACK ONSET & DURATION:
Date began: ___ / ___ / ___ AM or PM
Date ended: ___ / ___ / ___ AM or PM

JOINT(S) AFFECTED:

SYMPTOMS:

☐ Swelling
☐ Tenderness
☐ Redness
☐ Heat
☐ Pain
☐ Other ______________________

PAIN SEVERITY:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
mild ______________________ severe
How quickly did your pain become severe?

POSSIBLE TRIGGERS:
(check all that apply)

☐ Joint injury or trauma
☐ Drinking too much alcohol
☐ Eating large amounts of purine-rich foods
☐ hard liquor
☐ beer
☐ Other (please explain):

MEDICATIONS TAKEN:

List the medications you have taken to relieve this gout flare:
__________________________________________________________

List medications you take for lowering uric acid levels and ongoing gout management:
__________________________________________________________

List other medications, vitamins and supplements you take:
__________________________________________________________

GOUT ATTACK MANAGEMENT TACTICS:

List anything you did to cope with pain, such as using ice and elevating or resting joints:
__________________________________________________________

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Date of last doctor visit: _____ / _____ / ______
Date of last serum uric acid test: _____ / _____ / ______
Serum uric acid level: ________

USE THE BACK OF THIS SHEET TO LIST ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE FOR YOUR DOCTOR.

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REFERENCES


