

Gout

About Gout

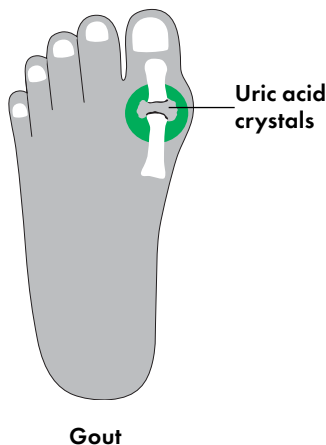
Gout is a type of arthritis (sometimes called gouty arthritis) that develops in some people who have high blood levels of uric acid. Uric acid is produced naturally by the body and from eating foods that have purines — substances in animal and plant foods that the body turns into uric acid. Normally, the kidneys remove uric acid from the blood, and it leaves the body through the urine. With gout, excess uric acid builds up in tendons and joints, forming needle-like crystals that cause extreme pain.

Other factors that can lead to gout include:

- Being overweight
- Kidney problems
- Certain medications
- Eating too many foods with purines or sugar
- Drinking too much alcohol or not enough water
- Having a family history of gout
- Having untreated high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity or other conditions that raise your stroke risk.

Gout Signs and Symptoms

Gout attacks (or flares) usually come on suddenly. You may go to bed feeling fine but wake up with extreme joint pain. The first gout attack usually occurs in the large joint of the big toe. However, other joints and areas around the joints can be affected, like foot arches (insteps), ankles, heels and knees. Common symptoms include swelling, stiffness, tenderness, warmth and redness in and around joints. The pain may last hours or weeks.



A build-up of uric acid (called a tophus) can look and feel like a lump under the skin. These uric acid clumps can also cause kidney stones.

Diagnosing Gout

Your doctor will ask you about your personal and family health history, perform a physical exam and use bloodwork and other tests (such as X-rays, ultrasound or a CT scan) to diagnose gout. Drawing fluid from the joint (joint aspiration) also might be needed.

➔ FAST FACTS

- For many people, gout is a chronic (long-lasting) disease that involves sudden, painful attacks. Other people may have only a few attacks and don't need long-term medication.
- Gout affects about 9.2 million people aged 20 or older. About two-thirds of them are men, and it is more common in Black and Asian people in the U.S. than in white people.
- Gout is more common in women after menopause.
- Having too much uric acid in the bloodstream (called hyperuricemia) is the most important factor causing gout.
- Heart disease is common in people with gout.

For More Information

Gout Information & Resources:

arthritis.org/about-gout

Arthritis Foundation Helpline:

800-283-7800

arthritis.org/helpline

Having high uric acid levels alone does not mean that someone will get gout. If untreated though, gout may damage joints, limit movement and cause chronic (long-lasting) pain.

Treating Gout

The main goals of gout treatment are to:

- Reduce pain
- Prevent flares and joint damage
- Lower uric acid levels
- Reduce inflammation that can damage joints and organs.

Work with your doctor to develop an ongoing plan to ease pain, keep uric acid low and lower inflammation. The plan may include:

- **Medication.** Medications can help lower uric acid, prevent flares and keep gout from becoming long-term. Other medications, including nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), analgesics and corticosteroids, may be used to treat inflammation and pain.
- **Physical Activity and Weight Management.** Getting regular physical activity and staying a healthy weight can lower your chances of more gout attacks or getting heart disease, which is common in people with gout.
- **Diet.** While many people need medicine to control their gout, eating a healthy diet may lower the chance of having another flare. That includes lots of vegetables, whole grains, proteins from plants instead of meats (like beans, lentils and peas), healthy fats (like tree nuts and extra-virgin olive oil) and foods that aren't highly processed. Eating less purine-rich meats, seafood, including shellfish, and other foods that trigger flares, and cutting alcohol can help lower uric acid levels in the body and limit gout flares.

Self-Management Tips

- Eat a heart-healthy diet and avoid high-purine foods
- Get regular physical activity
- Drink plenty of water
- Reach and maintain a healthy weight
- Contact your doctor at the first sign of a flare.

FAQs

What foods trigger gout attacks? Alcohol (especially beer) and foods with lots of purines. They include liver, kidney and other organ meats; beef, lamb, pork and other red meats; anchovies, sardines, mackerel, herring, trout, haddock, tuna and shellfish; gravies; sodas, juices and other sugary beverages and tomatoes.

How can I get the pain of a gout flare under control? If your medical conditions allow, your doctor will give you an anti-inflammatory medication, like a corticosteroid or colchicine. Ice the joint and keep it raised. Drink plenty of fluids (no alcohol or sugary sodas).

Does gout ever go away? No, the disease does not have a cure, and most but not all patients need long-term treatment to prevent symptoms. Gout flares usually get better within a week to 10 days. Symptoms may reappear if the disease is not properly managed. Another attack may not happen for months or even years. Medications that lower uric acid can help prevent them. Work with your doctor to keep uric acid levels low and prevent future gout attacks.