

About Gout

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

A gout attack can also be caused by joint injury, infection, kidney problems, medications or diet habits (e.g., a purine-rich, sugary diet, drinking too much alcohol or not enough water). Being overweight, having a family history of gout or having untreated high blood pressure, diabetes or metabolic syndrome also increases the risk of developing gout.

Gout Signs and Symptoms

Gout attacks 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. The build-up of uric acid can look and feel like lumps under the skin (tophi). It can also collect in the kidneys and cause small, hard deposits (kidney stones).

FAST FACTS

- **Gout is the most common type of inflammatory arthritis.**
- **It affects about 8.3 million individuals age 20 or older, at least three-fourths of whom are men.**
- **The buildup of uric acid in the blood stream is called hyperuricemia.**
- **In women, gout tends to occur after menopause.**
- **Heart disease is common in people with gout.**

Diagnosing Gout

Gout has similar symptoms as other forms of arthritis or a joint infection. Your doctor will ask you about your personal and family health history, perform a physical exam and use blood and other diagnostic tests to make an accurate gout diagnosis.

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

For More Information

Gout Information
www.arthritis.org/gout

Wipe Out Gout
www.arthritis.org/wipeoutgout

Arthritis Foundation Help Line
1-844-571-HELP (toll-free)

Treating Gout

The main goals of gout treatment are to:

- Prevent uric acid buildup.
- Reduce inflammation that can affect joints and organs.

Together, you and your doctor will develop an ongoing plan to control uric acid levels and fight inflammation. The treatment plan may include:

- **Medication.** Prescription medications can help lower uric acid to prevent gout attacks and keep the condition from becoming chronic. Other medications may be used to treat inflammation and pain. (Learn more about medications for gout at arthritis.org/drug-guide.)

- **Physical Activity and Weight Management.** Participating in regular physical activity and maintaining a healthy weight can lower your risk of repeated gout attacks, as well as the chances of developing heart disease, which is common in people with gout.

 **SELF-MANAGEMENT TIPS**

- **Eat a heart-healthy diet and avoid or minimize purine-rich foods.**
- **Engage in regular physical activity.**
- **Drink plenty of water.**
- **Reach and maintain a proper weight.**
- **Contact your doctor at the first sign of a flare.**

- **Diet.** Eating a healthy diet rich in vegetables, whole grains, plant proteins (e.g., beans, lentils, peas), healthy fats (e.g., nuts, extra-virgin olive oil) and minimally processed foods may reduce your risk of a gout attack. Eliminating or minimizing purine-rich meats/seafoods and watching alcohol intake can help lessen uric acid levels in the body and limit acute gout flares.

FAQ

What foods trigger gout attacks (flares)?

Heavy amounts of alcohol (especially beer) and the following foods high in purines may be triggers for gout flares: liver, kidney, sweetbreads and other organ meats; red meats (e.g., beef, lamb, pork); select seafood (e.g., anchovies, sardines, mackerel, herring, mussels, scallops, trout, haddock and tuna); broths, consommés, gravies; sugary beverages; tomatoes.

How can I get the pain and swelling of a gout flare under control?

If your medical conditions allow, an anti-inflammatory medication, corticosteroid or colchicine is used. Treatment is started as soon as possible after a flare begins. You'll also need to ice and elevate the

joint. Drink plenty of fluids (no alcohol or sweet sodas). Call your health care provider and make an appointment.

Does gout ever go away?

Despite the sudden onset and intense pain, gout flares usually get better within a week to 10 days, and symptoms may disappear if the disease is properly managed. Sometimes the next attack may not happen for months or even years. Medications that lower uric acid can help prevent gout attacks and keep the condition from becoming chronic. It's important that once you have an attack, you work with your doctor to control uric acid levels and prevent future gout attacks.