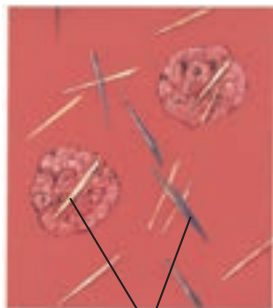


# MANAGING YOUR GOUT



Gout is a kind of arthritis, an illness that causes pain and swelling in joints.

Crystals in joints cause inflammation, pain, and swelling. These crystals are made of uric acid. Either too much uric acid is made, or not enough is removed from the blood by the kidneys. Injuries, surgery, acute illness, aspirin, medicines, some foods (liver and other organ meats, sardines, anchovies), and alcohol can trigger attacks.



Uric acid crystals in joint fluid



Sudden, intense joint pain and swelling are symptoms. Joints may feel hot and tender and turn red. Even lightly touching the joint can cause severe pain. Feet are most often affected, usually the big toe, but ankles, knees, and hands can also have gout.



Your health care provider will make a diagnosis from your medical history and physical examination. The only sure way to diagnose gout is to use a needle to take fluid from the joint. The fluid is checked to see whether it contains uric acid crystals.



## What Is Gout?

Gout is a kind of arthritis, an illness that causes pain and swelling in joints.

## What Causes Gout?

Crystals released into a joint cause inflammation, pain, and swelling. These crystals are made of a substance called uric acid. Either too much uric acid is made, or not enough is removed from the blood by the kidneys. Alcohol, aspirin, medicines, and some foods (liver and other organ meats, sardines, anchovies) can cause high uric acid levels. Attacks may occur at any time, but injuries, surgery, acute illness, rich foods, and alcohol can trigger them.

## What Are the Symptoms of Gout?

Sudden, intense joint pain and swelling are symptoms. Joints may feel hot and tender and turn red. Even lightly touching the joint can cause severe pain, which is usually continuous and worse if the joint is moved. A sudden attack usually lasts several days. Attacks can happen years apart or occur back to back. Some people can have long-lasting, constant pain. Everyday activities (walking, dressing, lifting) may be hard to do.

Gout can occur in any joint, but most often feet are affected, usually the big toe. Gout can also occur in hands, ankles, insteps, or knees.

## How Is Gout Diagnosed?

The health care provider will make a diagnosis from the medical history and physical examination. The health care provider may do blood tests but they can be unreliable, since the uric acid level can be high or normal during a gout attack. The only sure way to diagnose gout is to use a needle to take fluid from the joint. The fluid is checked to see whether it contains uric acid crystals.

## How Is Gout Treated?

Attacks can be treated and prevented. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as indomethacin and naproxen, are used for treatment. Other drugs include colchicine, another antiinflammatory drug, and prednisone. Removal of fluid from the joint, followed by cortisone injection, is another treatment. Cortisone injections usually give the fastest and best relief of pain and swelling.

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Drugs (NSAIDs) are used to treat attacks. Prevention is needed for people with tophi, kidney stones, and frequent attacks. Medicines can lower uric acid levels and prevent attacks.

Removing fluid from the joint, followed by injecting cortisone into the joint, is another treatment. Cortisone injections usually give the fastest and best relief of pain and swelling.



Avoid liver and other organ meats, sardines, and anchovies, which may increase uric acid levels. Stop drinking alcohol.

Make lifestyle changes to prevent attacks. Lose weight if you are overweight.



Call your health care provider if you begin to lose movement in the joint; you have warmth, redness, or pain after a cortisone injection; you have medicine side effects; or medicine doesn't help your symptoms.



After attacks are treated, symptoms usually go away within hours to a few days. Untreated attacks may last several days. People with higher blood uric acid levels are more likely to have many attacks. High uric acid levels for many years can cause deposits of uric acid under the skin, called tophi.

Prevention is needed for people with tophi, kidney stones, and frequent attacks. Lowering uric acid levels prevents attacks. The medicines allopurinol, febuxostat, and probenecid can do this.

### DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Gout:

- ✓ **DO** rest the affected joint until symptoms start to improve.
- ✓ **DO** take your medicines as prescribed.
- ✓ **DO** ask your health care provider which over-the-counter medicines you're allowed to take.
- ✓ **DO** make lifestyle changes to prevent attacks. Lose weight if you're very overweight. Avoid liver and other organ meats, sardines, and anchovies, which may increase uric acid levels. Stop drinking alcohol.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have medicine side effects or medicine doesn't help symptoms.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you begin to lose movement in the joint.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you have warmth, redness, or pain after a cortisone injection.
- ⊘ **DON'T** drink alcohol. Too much alcohol can cause gout.
- ⊘ **DON'T** start medications that lower uric acid, such as allopurinol or febuxostat, immediately after an attack subsides since this may prolong the attack or cause another gout attack. It's best to wait several days after an attack subsides before starting these medications.

### FROM THE DESK OF

### NOTES

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following sources:

- American College of Rheumatology  
Tel: (404) 633-3777  
Website: <http://www.rheumatology.org>
- Arthritis Foundation  
Tel: (800) 283-7800  
Website: <http://www.arthritis.org>
- The Arthritis Society  
Website: <http://www.arthritis.ca>