

Gout

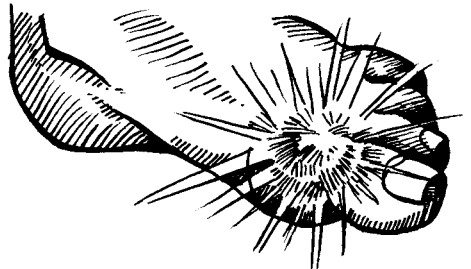
Gout is a common and very painful type of arthritis that occurs when uric acid crystals form in and around a joint. It more commonly affects men, especially after the age of 40. Gout can usually be well controlled with medicines and changes to diet.

Uric acid (urate) is one of the body's waste products. If uric acid builds up in the bloodstream, it can settle in and around joints as crystals. Uric acid crystals irritate the joint, causing the inflammation and pain of a gout attack. People who get gout usually have a high level of uric acid in their blood. Gout commonly begins in one joint, most often the big toe joint, but it may spread to more joints. It often affects foot, ankle, knee, hand, wrist and elbow joints.

Signs and symptoms

A gout attack usually comes on suddenly, often overnight. Common symptoms include:

- Joint inflammation, with swelling, redness and heat



- An extremely tender and painful joint, which is sensitive to touch. Sometimes even the weight of a bed sheet can cause severe pain.

If a fever is also present, it is important to consult a doctor as soon as possible.

Without treatment, a gout attack usually lasts about one week. After having one gout attack, more attacks are likely. The time between gout attacks can be days, weeks, months or years. If gout is not

managed correctly, the time between attacks may get shorter, attacks may last longer and more joints may be affected. Repeated gout attacks can permanently damage joints and also lead to kidney problems.

Contributing factors

Factors that may contribute to a person developing gout include:

- A family history of gout
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Being overweight or overeating
- Joint injury or surgery
- Certain medical conditions (e.g., high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney disease)
- Certain medicines (e.g., fluid tablets (diuretics), cancer chemotherapy)
- Crash dieting or fasting
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Eating foods that increase uric acid in the blood.

Foods that can increase uric acid levels

Foods high in proteins and purines may increase blood uric acid levels, but there is very little scientific evidence about the effect of these foods on gout attacks. There is some evidence that eating meat or seafood can be a factor in gout attacks. Foods high in proteins or purines include:

- Large amounts of meat, especially red meat

- Liver, kidney, brains, heart
- Meat extracts (e.g., Bonox, Bovril, gravies)
- Seafood, especially shellfish, scallops, mussels, sardines, herrings, mackerel, anchovies
- Foods containing yeast (e.g., beer, *Vegetite*)
- Beans, peas, lentils, oatmeal
- Asparagus, mushrooms, cauliflower, spinach.

Self care

- It is best to start a 'gout reliever' medicine at the first sign of a gout attack. Ask a doctor or pharmacist.
- An ice pack held against the inflamed joint may ease pain until medicines start to work. Apply an ice pack for 20 minutes, then remove and allow the joint to return to normal temperature before applying again.
- During a gout attack, protect and rest the inflamed joint. Keep the joint raised whenever possible, to reduce swelling.
- Limit alcohol. Try light beer and low-alcohol wines and avoid drinking a lot of alcohol at one time (binge drinking) as this may bring on an attack.
- Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' – unless a doctor advises not to.
- Eat regular, healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grains.

- Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Limit or avoid foods that trigger your gout.
- Keep to a healthy weight.

Medicines

There are two types of gout medicine – ‘gout reliever’ medicines to relieve attacks and ‘gout preventer’ medicines to prevent attacks.

Relieving attacks

Medicines that reduce pain and swelling are used to relieve gout attacks. They should be started at the first sign of symptoms and taken until the attack has settled or for as long as directed by your doctor.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g., diclofenac, ibuprofen, indomethacin) are the medicines most commonly prescribed by doctors to relieve a gout attack. Colchicine and corticosteroids (e.g., prednisolone) are sometimes used instead.

Aspirin should not be used for pain relief during a gout attack, as the doses needed for pain relief can increase the uric acid level in blood. Low dose aspirin can usually be continued – check with your doctor or pharmacist.

Preventing attacks

Gout preventer medicines help to prevent gout attacks, by lowering uric acid blood levels. They can help existing uric acid crystals to dissolve, stop new crystals forming and prevent kidney problems.

- Allopurinol is the medicine most often prescribed by doctors to prevent gout. Probenecid is sometimes used instead.
- A ‘gout preventer’ must be taken regularly every day, whether or not you have any symptoms. It should be continued during a gout attack.
- A ‘gout preventer’ will not relieve the symptoms of a gout attack. If ‘preventer’ treatment is started during an attack, it can make gout symptoms worse. Treatment with a ‘gout preventer’ usually starts when gout symptoms have settled.
- Gout attacks may continue for a few months after starting a ‘gout preventer’. Your doctor may advise you to also take a ‘gout relieving’ medicine during this time.
- Treatment with a ‘gout preventer’ is usually life long. If treatment is stopped suddenly, gout may worsen.

For more information

Arthritis Australia

Phone: 1800 011 041

Website: www.arthritisaustralia.com.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

*Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.*

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