Gout

What is gout?

Gout [gowt] is a type of arthritis [arth-RIE-tiss] caused by high levels of uric acid in the body. Uric acid (or urate) is a chemical that's made in the body. Uric acid is removed from the blood by the kidneys and is passed out of the body through urine (pee). If the body makes too much uric acid or the kidneys can't remove enough of it, small needle-like crystals can form in the joints. These deposits cause gout.

What are the symptoms of gout?

Acute gouty arthritis is an attack of gout that comes on suddenly. These flare-ups usually affect only a single joint in the lower body — the base of the big toe, ankle, or knee are most common.

During an acute gouty attack, you may notice:

- Pain, swelling, redness, and warmth in the joint.
- Pain that starts late at night or very early in the morning.
- Pain that is at its worst 12 to 24 hours after it starts (some amount of pain and swelling may remain for days or weeks after).

If the gout is serious or goes untreated, it may spread to other joints, including fingers, wrists, elbows, shoulders, and hips. The crystals can also cause kidney stones.

Chronic tophaceous [tow-FAY-shus] **gout** is when crystals build up over a long time. The crystals form deposits called tophi [TOW-figh] and can sometimes be seen or felt through the skin. Tophi cause damage to the joints and surrounding areas, which can lead to chronic (long-term) arthritis.

Who is at risk for getting gout?

Some medical conditions increase your chance of getting gout:

- Hyperuricemia [high-per-you-ruh-SEE-mee-uh] (high levels of uric acid in your bloodstream)
- High blood pressure
- Kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity

Other things that increase risk include:

- **Sex.** Adult men are more likely to develop gout than women.
- **Age.** Gout tends to affect older adults (age 40 and over). Gout in children is rare.
- **Diet.** Certain foods can increase uric acid in the body, including some fish and seafood, red meat, fatty foods, and sugary drinks.
- **Alcohol consumption.** Alcohol, especially beer, can increase uric acid levels. Alcohol can also cause dehydration and trigger inflammation.
- **Fasting or overeating.**
- **Family history of gout.**

How is gout diagnosed?

Gout can be hard to diagnose. Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and may take fluid from a painful joint to check for uric acid crystals. Your blood may also be checked for high levels of uric acid.

How is gout treated?

Treatment for gout depends on whether you have acute (short-term) gouty arthritis or chronic gout. While there is not cure for gout, treatment can help:

- Prevent gouty arthritis attacks
- Improve recovery times
- Reduce tophi deposits
- Prevent complications, such as kidney stones

Acute treatment

To treat acute gouty arthritis attacks, your doctor will prescribe medication that helps reduce swelling and pain.

Commonly used medications include:

- **NSAIDs (Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs,** including ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve)
- **Corticosteroids (anti-inflammatory steroids),** includeing prednisone and prednisolone
- **Colchicine** [KOL-che-seen], an alternative for people who are unable to use NSAIDs

Take the medication as soon as you feel an attack is starting. This will help shorten the duration of the attack and help you recover sooner. Rest and ice may also help relieve discomfort.

Your doctor will work with you to determine the best medication for your health situation. Tell your doctor about all the medications you are on, including over-the-counter medications, supplements, inhalers, liquid medications, and patches.

Long-term treatment

The goal of long-term treatments is to lower the level of uric acid in your body. Long-term treatments require both medications and lifestyle changes, for example:

- Taking medication to lower uric acid levels in your body.
- Managing other health conditions (like diabetes, high blood pressure, or kidney disease).
- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Eating a gout-friendly diet, which includes eating foods low in purines and avoiding foods that cause inflammation. For example:
  - Eat less red meat
  - Avoid high-purine seafood, such as anchovies, codfish, herring, mackerel, mussels, sardines, scallops, and trout.
  - Eat more low-fat dairy products.
  - Stay hydrated by drinking lots of water.
  - Limit alcohol, especially beer and liquor.
  - Avoid foods that are high in refined sugars and saturated fats.