



## What is it?

### Points To Remember About Gout

- Gout is a common condition that causes attacks of pain and swelling in your joints, especially your big toe.
- Gout is caused by uric acid crystals building up in your joints and kidneys.
- You can reduce your risk of gout attacks by limiting alcohol and foods high in a substance called purines.
- Your doctor can recommend medicines and treatments to reduce the pain of gout attacks and help you have fewer attacks.
- Proper treatment of gout can prevent permanent damage to your joints and kidneys.

Gout is a kind of arthritis that causes painful and stiff joints. Gout is caused by the build up of crystals made of a substance called uric acid in your joints. It often starts in the big toe and can also cause lumps under the skin and kidney stones.

## Who gets it?

Millions of people have gout at some time in their lives. Usually, people who get gout get it when they are middle aged or older, but children and young adults occasionally get it. Men, especially those between ages 40 and 50, are more likely to develop gout than women. Women rarely develop gout before menopause.

You are more likely to get gout if you:

- Have a family history of gout.
- Have had an organ transplant.

- Are a man.
- Are an adult.
- Are overweight.
- Drink alcohol.
- Eat a lot of foods rich in purines.
- Have been exposed to lead.

Some other health problems can make it more likely for you to have too much uric acid in the blood. These include:

- Renal insufficiency, a condition in which your kidneys don't get rid of enough waste.
- High blood pressure.
- Hypothyroidism, or an underactive thyroid gland.
- Conditions that make your cells reproduce and shed more quickly than usual, such as psoriasis, hemolytic anemia, and some cancers.
- Kelley-Seegmiller syndrome or Lesch-Nyhan syndrome, two rare conditions in which your body doesn't have enough of the enzyme that helps control uric acid levels.

Some medications make you more likely to develop gout, including:

- Diuretics, which are taken to rid the body of excess fluid in condition like hypertension, edema, and heart disease. Diuretics reduce the amount of uric acid passed in the urine.
- Drugs with salicylate, such as aspirin.
- Niacin, a vitamin also known as nicotinic acid.
- Cyclosporine, a medication that blocks the body's immune system to treat some autoimmune diseases and to prevent the body from rejecting transplanted organs.
- Levodopa, a medicine used to treat Parkinson's disease.

## What are the symptoms?

Gout causes pain in your joints, often in the big toe. Many people get their first attack of gout in one of their big toes, but it can also affect other joints in your feet, arms, and legs. In addition to pain, your joint may feel swollen, red, warm, and stiff.

In the early stages of gout, you may have attacks that start at night and come on suddenly. Intense pain and swelling may be bad enough to wake you up. Gout attacks are often triggered by stressful events, alcohol, drugs, or another illness.

Usually, a gout attack will get better in three to 10 days, even without treatment. After that, you may not have another attack for months or even years. Over time, however, your attacks may last longer and happen more often.

After a long period of time, such as 10 years or so, gout can sometimes advance and cause permanent damage to your joints and kidneys. With proper treatment, however, most people with gout do not have permanent damage.

## What causes it?

Your body has substances called purines in its tissues. Purines are also found in many foods, including liver, dried beans and peas, and anchovies. When purines break down, they become uric acid.

Normally, uric acid dissolves in your blood and passes out of your body when you pee. When you have too much uric acid in your blood, it can start to form crystals in your joints and under your skin, causing gout.

Things that can cause uric acid to build up in the blood include:

- Your body increasing the amount of uric acid it makes.
- Your kidneys not getting rid of enough uric acid.
- Eating too many foods high in purines.

## Is there a test?

Your doctor can test your blood to see if you have high levels of uric acid. They may also draw a sample of fluid from one of your painful joints to look for crystals of uric acid.

## How is it treated?

Proper treatment can reduce the pain from gout attacks, help prevent future attacks, and prevent damage to your joints.

Your doctor may recommend medications to treat your pain. These may include:

- Anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which can reduce pain and swelling.
- Corticosteroids, such as prednisone, which are strong anti-inflammatory hormones.
- Colchicine, which works best when taken within the first 12 hours of a gout attack.
- Other medications to reduce symptoms or reduce the build up of uric acid in your blood.

Your doctor may also recommend diet and lifestyle changes, such as losing weight, if you are overweight, and eating fewer foods that are high in purines.

## Living With It

In addition to taking medications recommended by your doctor, you can make some changes to

your diet to help you have fewer gout attacks. As always, talk with your doctor before making any changes to your diet or medications.

Your doctor may recommend that you lose weight, if you are overweight, or drink less alcohol. You can also avoid eating foods with lots of purines, since they can increase your uric acid levels. Foods that are high in purines include:

- Anchovies.
- Asparagus.
- Beef kidneys.
- Brains.
- Dried beans and peas.
- Game meats.
- Gravy.
- Herring.
- Liver.
- Mackerel.
- Mushrooms.
- Sardines.
- Scallops.
- Sweetbreads.

## Other Medical Problems

If gout goes untreated for a long period of time, such as 10 years, it can permanently damage your joints and kidneys. This is called chronic tophaceous gout. With proper treatment, however, most people with gout do not have this problem.

## For More Info

### **U.S. Food and Drug Administration**

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

Drugs@FDA at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf>. Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics**

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

### **American College of Rheumatology**

Website: <https://www.rheumatology.org/>

### **Arthritis Foundation**

Website: <https://www.arthritis.org/>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at [NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov).

- [Asian Language Health Information](#)
- [Spanish Language Health Information](#)

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## **View/Download/Order Publications**

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[Gout, Questions and Answers about](#)  
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