



Take a Stand on Gout

Who Gets Gout and Why



Gout is a form of arthritis.

It is a serious, lifelong disease that needs ongoing treatment and requires some changes to lifestyle habits to achieve control. People who have gout experience times of severe pain in one or more joints. The pain can come on quickly and is very intense, and then goes away after several days. Unfortunately, most people who have gout will have another painful flare within a year. More than three out of four people will have another attack within two years.

Understanding the disease and following treatment advice are important. If left untreated, advanced gout can lead to the same level of work loss, physical disability and diminished quality of life as seen in advanced rheumatoid arthritis.



Gout is often called the “disease of kings” because it’s one of the oldest known medical conditions. It is historically associated with eating rich foods and consuming a lot of alcohol, particularly beer. Even though it has been present

for centuries, the number of people who have gout now is on the rise. People in industrial societies now have access to rich food, are not physically active and they live longer. As a result, some of the risk factors for gout, like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and too much uric acid in the body, are affecting a growing number of people.

What is uric acid and what does it have to do with gout?

Uric acid is naturally produced in everyone’s body. Too much of it can put people at risk for gout. As cells die they release substances called purines, which are also found in some foods. Purines break down and are eliminated as uric acid. Uric acid passes through the kidneys into urine to be eliminated. If there is more uric acid then one’s kidneys can get rid of, hyperuricemia (high uric acid in the blood) develops. Hyperuricemia is the leading risk factor for gout.

Lowering uric acid level to a normal range is the key therapy. Interestingly enough, not everyone with hyperuricemia will get gout, but once it develops it is likely to return, unless treated by medicine to lower uric acid.

Medication to lower your uric acid level and some changes to your diet and exercise habits can reduce the amount of uric acid you have.

After years of hyperuricemia, the extra uric acid in the body can turn into crystals in your joints and in other tissues. These crystals are what set the stage for a painful attack of gout. The crystals cause severe pain and swelling. The pain can be so strong that people often need to go to the emergency room for help.

Who can get gout?

Gout is most common among middle-age to older men. First attacks are seen between the ages of 40 and 55, although it can occur at any age. Women can get gout, but usually do not experience an attack until a decade or more after menopause.

Risk factors for gout are:

- High levels of uric acid in the blood
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- Kidney disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- High lipids and heart disease
- Family history

Talk to your doctor about your overall health and health history. Discuss your family’s health history, too. All of this information is important in understanding how best to monitor and treat gout and other health conditions that may be part of the big picture of your health.

For more information, talk to your doctor or visit GoutEducation.org