

Take a Stand on Gout

Medical Advice for Patients with Gout

Gout is a disease that lasts a lifetime once diagnosed. With proper medication and lifestyle modifications, many patients can gain excellent control of the disease, and flares can become few and far between. Flares can often remain dormant for life with proper medical therapy and lifestyle changes. As with many other serious health conditions, early diagnosis and treatment are key. If left untreated, gout can cause permanent damage in your joints that could limit your activities.

What happens during a gout attack?

A gout attack begins suddenly, often as a twinge in a joint, which rapidly becomes hot and very painful. It usually strikes a joint like one of your big toes, the middle of a foot, an ankle or a knee. The pain gets worse very fast. The joint will become tender to the touch, swollen and red over a 12-hour period. If untreated, a gout flare will stay at an intense level of pain over several days and will gradually go away over a week or so. Low grade fever and feeling poorly are not unusual.

It is important to understand that it would be rare for your first attack – or flare – to be the last.

When people first have flares of gout, they may only have an attack once in a while. It may only last for five to seven days. But most of the time, they return. Once someone has two attacks within a 12-month period, medical professionals generally recommend starting medication to lower the amount of uric acid in his body. Too much uric acid in the body sets the stage for an attack of gout.

Everyone with gout needs to know their current uric acid level and their goal level. As a general rule, the goal is to achieve a blood level of uric acid at or below 6.0 mg/dL. A simple blood test can determine the level. It is recommended that gout patients have their serum uric acid level tested twice per year.

Without regular monitoring of their condition and proper treatment, the pain and uncontrolled uric acid problems will worsen. Many people go from having attacks of gout from time to time to having what is called advanced gout. Then, the attacks occur more frequently and in more joints. The joints can become deformed and swollen, and patients will experience increasing and often chronic pain. Seeking medical care right away and following doctor's orders are essential to preventing your gout from progressing to the advanced stage.

Keep in mind that with the proper treatment, gout is manageable!

Gout treatment

Your doctor will focus on two types of treatment:

1. Pain management
2. Therapy to lower your uric acid level (urate-lowering therapy)

Pain Management for Gout Flares

Pain management is important. There are many options for controlling pain, and there is no need to suffer through a flare. Sometimes over-the-counter drugs are used, but most often prescription medications are needed to manage the excruciating pain of an attack. These include:

- Colchicine
- Glucocorticosteroids (Prednisone, Medrol)

- Anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen, naproxen

Medicine to lower uric acid

There are several drugs that help lower uric acid levels in the body. These are called urate-lowering therapies and include the following:

- Allopurinol
- Febuxostat
- Pegloticase
- Probenecid

Dosing is individualized. As with other medications, you may tolerate some combinations better than others. Let your medical professional know of any unpleasant side-effects. Adjustments to the dosage or type of medication can be made until the right treatment is in place.

Tell your health care professional about all of your other medical problems and medications including over-the-counter products you take, including herbs, vitamins and supplements. Some medications raise your uric acid level. Some lower it. Occasionally, those can be adjusted too.

IMPORTANT NOTE: When patients first begin a urate-lowering medication, they can have gout flares. They are a sign that the body is working to get rid of the extra uric acid. It is important to keep taking your medicine and let your health care professional know so they can be sure you have something on hand to treat pain.

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