

# Managing Gout

Treatment requires a multifaceted approach

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**GOUT**, a form of inflammatory arthritis that develops in people with high levels of uric acid in the blood, can cause sudden, severe episodes of pain, tenderness, redness and swelling.<sup>1</sup>

The first symptom of gout is often intense pain and swelling in the big toe. The pain may also appear in other lower-body joints, such as the ankle or knee. Later attacks may occur off and on, primarily in the foot and knee, before becoming chronic.<sup>2</sup>

While gout usually affects one joint at a time, when untreated it can impact multiple joints. Over time, pain that usually resolves in a week to 10 days could become a milder, constant pain. Left unchecked, gout can cause other health issues, such as painless but disfiguring lumps of crystals under the skin around joints.<sup>2</sup> Other health consequences associated with gout include high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic kidney disease and cardiovascular disease.<sup>2</sup>

## Risk Factors

Gout occurs in approximately 6 million men and 2 million women.<sup>1</sup> Up until age 60, men are more likely to develop gout than women. Estrogen protects women up to that point.<sup>1</sup>

Genetics play a role in development of the condition. Additionally, high cholesterol,

high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease may raise your risk of gout.<sup>1</sup> Obesity is also linked to an increased incidence of gout and at a younger age. Other risk factors of gout include meat and shellfish consumption as well as drinking more than two alcoholic beverages a day.<sup>1</sup>

## Treatment Plan

To effectively manage gout, a medication regimen and lifestyle changes are necessary. These medications include:<sup>3</sup>

- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs**
- **Corticosteroids**
- **Colchicine.**

When dealing with an acute gout episode patients should follow these steps:<sup>3</sup>

- Take an anti-inflammatory medication as soon as possible
- Ice and elevate the joint
- Drink plenty of fluids (no alcohol or sweet sodas)
- Call your doctor and make an appointment
- Relax; stress can aggravate gout
- Ask friends and family to help you with daily tasks.

Other medications reduce uric acid levels and can help prevent an acute gout attack. These medications include allopurinol, febuxostat, probenecid and pegloticase.

## Self-Management

Patients with gout must develop healthy lifestyle habits to effectively manage their disease.

This begins by adopting a healthy diet that includes all the food groups, especially vegetables, whole grains, plant proteins such as nuts and legumes, and low-fat dairy. Refined carbohydrates and processed foods should be avoided as much as possible.<sup>4</sup>

Foods that can help manage gout flare-ups include: skim milk and other low-fat dairy products; whole grain foods; plant oils (olive, canola, sunflower); some fruits (those that are less sweet); vitamin C supplements (500 to 1,000 milligrams daily); and water.<sup>4</sup>

Following a healthy diet goes hand-in-hand with physical activity. If you suffer from gout, it is important to reach and maintain a proper body weight because it not only reduces uric acid in the blood, but also lowers the risk of heart disease and stroke, which people with gout are more prone to develop.<sup>4</sup>

These lifestyle changes are often easier said than done, but finding a balance is important for effective management of gout and overall health. ■

## References

1. Arthritis Foundation. What is Gout? <http://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/gout/what-is-gout.php>
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