



Your Guide To: Gout



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What is Gout?

Gout is a form of arthritis that is characterized by sudden and severe episodes of painful, warm and swollen joints. Gout is caused by a high level of uric acid in the joints of the body. Uric acid is typically excreted in the urine, but Gout occurs when the kidneys do not get rid of the acid properly or the body makes too much of the acid. The uric acid forms into urate crystals, which cause inflammation and pain in the joints.

Types of Gout:

Gout is classified as either primary or secondary, depending on what causes the high levels of uric acid in the blood (hyperuricemia).

1. **Primary Gout:** More than 99% of primary Gout cases are referred to as idiopathic, meaning that the cause of the excess uric acid cannot be determined. Primary Gout is most likely the result of a combination of genetic, hormonal, and dietary factors.
2. **Secondary Gout** is caused by drug therapy or by medical conditions other than a metabolic disorder.

A large percentage of patients who develop Gout at an older age report the use of diuretics, which are used to treat high blood pressure or heart failure.

Several other medications can increase uric acid levels and raise your risk for Gout. These include aspirin, niacin, and pyrazinamide.

Risk Factors for Gout

- **Obesity** - If you have a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher.
- **Joint injury** - Urate crystals are more likely to form in a joint that was previously damaged.
- **Diuretic medicines** (taken for high blood pressure, leg swelling or heart failure) - These can decrease the kidney's ability to remove uric acid, resulting in hyperuricemia, which is elevated uric acid levels.
- **Untreated high blood pressure, diabetes or high cholesterol is also a risk factor for Gout.**
- **High levels of serum triglycerides (a fatty substance)**

in the blood are associated with an increased risk of heart disease.

- **Chemotherapy** - The breakdown and turnover of cells leads to an increased production of uric acid.
- **Kidney disease**
- **Genetics** - One out of four people with Gout have a family history of the condition
- **A diet rich in purines, such as anchovies, red meat, nuts, and organ foods like liver, kidney, and sweetbreads is a risk factor for Gout.**

Signs & Symptoms

Gout usually affects only one joint, most often the big toe. It may also appear in a knee, ankle, wrist, foot or finger.

- The affected joint becomes red, swollen, painful, and very sensitive to the touch.
- The inflammation can cause fever, muscle aches, and other flu-like symptoms.
- First episodes of Gout often occur suddenly and usually occur at night.
- If left untreated, the pain and inflammation can last several days and lead to long-term arthritis with chronic swelling and permanent joint damage.
- The episodes can progressively get more serious and painful.

Who is likely to develop Gout?

Gout generally affects men over the age of 40. Women typically do not suffer from Gout until after menopause. Gout is often hereditary and when it develops in men before the age of 30, it can be especially severe.

How is Gout diagnosed?

A physician will do a physical exam and may take a test to measure the blood's uric acid level. However, to confirm a diagnosis of Gout, a physician will need to obtain and analyze fluid from the inflamed joint. In most cases, if a patient has Gout, monosodium urate crystals will be present in the fluid. The absence of crystals does not completely rule out a diagnosis of Gout because sometimes the crystals are too small to detect.



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Where does Gout strike?

Gout is most often felt in the large joint of the big toe, but it can affect other joints such as the instep, ankle, heel, knee, wrist, finger and elbow. The initial attack generally strikes suddenly and begins at night with the affected joint becoming red and swollen. Ninety percent of patients will suffer a Gout attack in their big toe at some time during the course of their disease. One explanation is that the big toe is more vulnerable to an attack because of the pressure it receives from walking. Another explanation is the fact that uric acid crystals form more readily at cooler temperatures, and the big toe is cooler than the central part of the body.

How long does a Gout attack usually last?

An initial Gout attack can last anywhere from three to 10 days. After experiencing a first attack, approximately 60 percent of patients will experience another attack within the first year, and 78 percent within two years.

How is heart disease and hypertension linked with Gout?

Gout is often associated with cardiac problems, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease and congestive heart failure. Because an elevated uric acid level is strongly associated with cardiovascular disease, studies are underway to determine if hypertension, kidney disease, and obesity are simply associated with elevated uric acid levels or if they actually have a direct causal role in these disorders.

Will Gout go away on its own?

While the symptoms of a Gout attack will generally go away within three to 10 days, an attack signals a person has Gout. Some people may only experience a few attacks in their lifetime. However, if left untreated there is the possibility that repeated attacks could lead to the formation of tophi (large lumps under the skin), joint deformity and potential crippling.

How is Gout treated?

Unfortunately, there is no cure for Gout. The pain and inflammation can be treated, however, and there are a number of ways to prevent future attacks. The goals of treatment are to ease the pain associated with acute attacks, prevent future attacks and avoid the formation of tophi and kidney stones. The treatment of Gout can be approached two ways - management of pain and lifestyle

adjustments:

- **Management of pain** - Medications are used to treat the pain of acute attacks of Gout and to lower uric acid levels. The target uric acid level is less than 6mg/dL.
- **Lifestyle adjustments** - Maintain a healthy, balanced diet and healthy body weight. Exercise regularly and keep well-hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Alcohol can trigger Gout attacks and should be avoided.