

Gout

Gout is a painful and potentially disabling form of arthritis. Initial symptoms usually consist of intense episodes of painful swelling in single joints, most often in the feet (especially the big toe). Gout occurs when excess uric acid (a normal waste product) accumulates in the body, and needle-like crystals deposit in the joints. This may happen because either uric acid production increases or, more often, the kidneys are unable to remove uric acid from the body adequately. Certain foods, such as shellfish and alcohol, may increase uric acid levels and lead to gout attacks. Some medications also can increase uric acid levels.



Symptoms:

The signs and symptoms of gout are almost always acute, occurring suddenly – often at night – and without warning. They include:

- **Intense joint pain.** Gout usually affects the large joint of your big toe, but it can occur in your feet, ankles, knees, hands and wrists. The pain is likely to be most severe within the first 12 to 24 hours after it begins.
- **Lingering discomfort.** After the most severe pain subsides, some joint discomfort may last from a few days to a few weeks. Later attacks are likely to last longer and affect more joints.
- **Inflammation and redness.** The affected joint or joints become swollen, tender and red.

How is it Treated?

- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).** NSAIDs may control inflammation and pain in people with gout. NSAIDs include over-the-counter options such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (Aleve), as well as more-powerful prescription NSAIDs such as indomethacin. NSAIDs carry risks of stomach pain, bleeding and ulcers.
- **Colchicine.** Another type of pain reliever that effectively reduces gout pain. Although very effective, possible side effects include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.
- **Corticosteroids.** Corticosteroids may be administered in pill form, or they can be injected into your joint. Corticosteroids are generally reserved for people who can't take either NSAIDs or colchicine.

How can I help prevent Gout?

- **Increased fluid intake.** Aim for 8 to 16 cups (about 2 to 4 liters) of fluid each day, with at least half being water. Limit sweetened beverages, especially those with high fructose corn syrup.
- **Limit or avoid alcohol.** Recent evidence suggests that beer may be particularly likely to increase the risk of gout symptoms, especially in men.
- **Eat a balanced diet.** Your daily diet should emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk products.
- **Get your protein from low-fat dairy products.** Low-fat dairy products may actually have a protective effect against gout.
- **Limit your intake of meat, fish and poultry.** A small amount may be tolerable, but pay close attention to what types – and how much – seem to cause problems for you.
- **Maintain a desirable body weight.** Choose portions that allow you to maintain a healthy weight. Losing weight may decrease uric acid levels in your body. But avoid fasting or rapid weight loss, since doing so may temporarily raise uric acid levels.