

Gout

Gout usually affects men over age 30 with a family history of gout, but it can occur at any time and also affects women, especially after menopause. Recent food and alcohol excess, surgery, infection, physical or emotional stress, or the use of certain drugs can lead to the development of gout symptoms.

Signs and Symptoms

- Extreme pain in a single joint, usually the base of the big toe, but other joints can also be affected (such as the feet, fingers, wrists, elbows, knees, or ankles)
- Joint is shiny red-purple, swollen, hot, and stiff
- Fever as high as 39°C (102.2° F) with or without chills
- Attack develops over a matter of hours and may get better over a few days or weeks
- In later attacks, you may see lumps (called tophi) just under the skin in the outer ear, hands, feet, elbow, or knee

What Causes It?

The body either produces too much uric acid, doesn't excrete enough uric acid, or both, so that the acid accumulates in tissues in the form of needle-like crystals that cause pain. Gout generally occurs because of a predisposition to the condition, but it can result from blood disorders or cancers, such as leukemia, or the use of certain drugs.

Nutrition

- Maintain a healthy weight. However, it is important to avoid crash dieting and rapid weight loss.
- Drink plenty of water because dehydration may make gout worse.
- Restrict purines in your diet. Purines increase lactate production, which competes with uric acid for excretion. Foods with a high purine content include beef, goose, organ meats, sweetbreads, mussels, anchovies, herring, mackerel, and yeast. Foods with a moderate amount of purines include meats, poultry, fish, and shellfish not listed above. Spinach, asparagus, beans, lentils, mushrooms, and dried peas also contain moderate amounts of purines.
- Do not drink alcohol, especially beer.
- Cherries—One half pound of cherries per day (fresh or frozen) for two weeks lowers uric acid and prevents attacks. Cherries and other dark red berries (hawthorn berries and blueberries) contain anthocyanidins that increase collagen integrity and decrease inflammation. Cherry juice (8 to 16 oz. per day) is also helpful.
- Folic acid—10 to 75 mg per day inhibits xanthine oxidase, which is required for uric acid production. .

