

Gout Patient Information Leaflet

What is gout?

Gout is a type of arthritis which results from deposits of uric acid salts in the joints. These deposits can cause episodes of pain, swelling, redness and heat in the joint. It can affect one to number of joints at a time.

It commonly affects the joint at the bottom of the great toe but can affect the foot, ankle, knee, elbow, finger and wrist joints. It can come on very suddenly and can be a condition that comes and goes.

Medication is usually very effective in treating the symptoms and preventing further attacks.

What causes gout?

It is caused by build-up of a substance called uric acid (or urate) in the blood. Uric acid is formed by breakdown of certain chemicals called purines in the body.

It is normal to have uric acid in the blood, but if you produce too much uric acid or your kidneys don't filter enough out, it can build up into tiny crystals in and around joints causing pain and inflammation. Some people with gout also have lumps of uric acid visible under the skin called tophi.

High level of uric acid can also cause cardiovascular diseases (heart disease).

You may be at risk of gout if:

- ✓ You have high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity or high cholesterol.
- ✓ You have kidney problems.
- ✓ You take certain medication such as water tablets or chemotherapy.
- ✓ You eat lots of food containing purines such as red meat (beef, lamb, pork), offal (kidney and liver) or seafood (pilchard, shellfish).
- ✓ You drink alcohol such as beer or spirits, particularly if you drink above the recommended levels (14 units a week).
- ✓ You take lots of sugary drinks.
- ✓ You have a relative with gout.

How is gout diagnosed?

Your doctor diagnoses gout depending on your symptoms, medical history and examination. Sometimes further tests are needed to diagnose gout:

- ✓ A blood test is used to measure the uric acid levels. A high level is usually associated with gout. The test is most accurately done outside an episode of joint pain and swelling.
- ✓ If there is a swollen joint, sometimes taking some fluid off the joint is needed to send for analysis to show uric acid crystals.
- ✓ An x-ray can sometimes show changes associated with gout.

How is gout treated?

The acute attack can be treated by pain relieving medication such as anti-inflammatories (Ibuprofen, Naproxen, Indometacin), Colchicine or steroids (Prednisolone), along with using ice packs and adequate rest to the joint.

To prevent further attacks your doctor may prescribe you with urate lowering therapy such as Allopurinol, along with a combination of lifestyle changes, such as losing weight, changing your diet and drinking less or no alcohol.

Some facts about Allopurinol:

- ✓ It reduces the production of uric acid hence reduce the attacks.
- ✓ It is to be taken once daily and dose can vary between 100 to 900 mg daily.
- ✓ When you start taking it, the dose will be adjusted until your uric acid level is low enough and regular blood tests are needed for this.
- ✓ It can sometimes cause an attack of gout when it is first started. Your doctor will give you one of the above acute attack treatments to take alongside Allopurinol for a period of time to help prevent an attack of gout.
- ✓ If your joints become painful, red or swollen after starting Allopurinol, you should start treatment for the acute attack immediately and see your doctor if it does not settle or if attacks are happening frequently in order to check that your Allopurinol dose is still correct.
- ✓ Once you are on Allopurinol you should continue to take it even if you get an attack of gout. DO NOT stop it unless you are told by your doctor.
- ✓ Most people taking Allopurinol won't experience any significant side effects. However, if you develop a rash, it can be a sign of reaction. Stop taking Allopurinol immediately and contact your doctor for advice.
- ✓ Once the uric acid levels fall to the ideal levels, you need to continue treatment. If the treatment is stopped, the uric acid levels are likely to rise and gout will come back.

What can you do?

Certain lifestyle changes can help reduce your risk of experiencing further attacks of gout:

- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight, lose weight if you are overweight but avoid crash dieting.
- ✓ Drink less or no alcohol, avoid beer and spirits in particular and don't binge drink.
- ✓ Drink plenty of water.
- ✓ Take your tablets regularly.
- ✓ Eat less red meat, offal, shellfish and yeast containing foods like Marmite and Bovril.
- ✓ Avoid sugary and fizzy drinks and sugary snacks.
- ✓ Take regular exercise.

✓ Take regular vitamin C and low fat dairy.

Further information: www.versusarthritis.org

Treatment in acute attacks

Name of the medication	Date started	Date stopped	Dose	Joints affected

Treatment to reduce uric acid level

Name of the medication	Date started	Date stopped	Dose	Comments

Record of uric acid level (target uric acid level 300mcmol/l or less)

Date	Uric Acid level mcmol/l