



Your Pharmacy
...your neighbour

Health Really Matters™

GOUT

Gout is an intensely painful form of arthritis that is very treatable once the diagnosis is confirmed.

Gout signals its presence with a sudden severe pain in a joint, often at night and often at the base of the big toe. The joint becomes tender and swollen and the skin is often red and warm. The pain also worsens to the touch.

When these symptoms strike, see your doctor for a confirmation of a diagnosis. He may give you a medication to act quickly to reduce the inflammation. Take it as directed. Keep your body adequately hydrated. Dehydration can increase uric acid levels so drink extra water each day (at least 6 cups). Also keep your alcohol consumption down—no more than two standard drinks per day for men and one daily for women. Otherwise, your risk of gout symptoms increases due to a slowing of the excretion of uric acid from the kidneys.

Weight loss is good if you are overweight. This can reduce your risk of future attacks of gout. Also, discuss all your current medications with your doctor and pharmacist. Some medications have side effects that can cause gout symptoms. An example is some diuretics (“water pills”) can increase uric acid levels which will warrant a change to a different diuretic.

What causes gout?

Gout is an intensely painful form of arthritis that is very treatable once the diagnosis is confirmed. It is also called hyperuricemia, an inflammatory arthritis caused by too much uric acid crystals in the joints and tissues. Our bodies produce uric acid normally through the breakdown of purines. Purines are substances found naturally in the body and in certain foods (see sidebar on p.2).

Normally, uric acid isn't a problem. It is dissolved in the blood and excreted in the urine like so many other chemicals our body doesn't need. However, sometimes there is an excess of uric acid and your kidneys can't get rid of it all so uric acid crystals will start to build up in certain joints and tissues resulting in pain, swelling and inflammation. The classic picture of gout, one that is often seen in movies, is that of a red, swollen big toe, but it can occur in your feet, ankles, knees, hands and wrists.

An acute attack of gout, if untreated, usually lasts about ten days to two weeks when the pain and swelling subside.

Who is at risk of developing gout? Those people who eat a diet rich in purines are more at risk of developing gout. Those who are overweight, have high cholesterol, drink too much alcohol, or have diabetes or high blood pressure also are more susceptible to gout. Gout also runs in the family so there can be a hereditary cause.

Besides diet, certain medications can cause gout. Certain diuretics (like hydrochlorothiazide), niacin (especially when taken in high doses for cholesterol reduction), A.S.A (even the low dose type), cyclosporin, a transplant anti-rejection drug and others. If you receive a new prescription, our Medicine Centre pharmacists will inform you of any pertinent side effects you should be aware of.

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