

GOUT - THE DISEASE OF KINGS

WHAT IS GOUT?

Gout is a painful form of arthritis that occurs when the body does not get rid of a substance called uric acid.

If you remember from your school biology class, when you dissolve something into water and the water starts to evaporate, you are left with crystals?

This is more or less what happens in the body. Because you eat too much of certain foods (called purine-rich food) or because you have inherited from your parents the inability to get rid of uric acid, uric acid crystals build up in your body. These crystals accumulate in joints, causing inflammation and pain.

CAUSES

- In about 10% of people, the body produces too much uric acid.
- In most people, the kidneys do not eliminate the uric acid. This happens in nearly 90% of patients. The reason why the kidneys do not excrete enough uric acid is not clear.
- Eating too much purine-containing foods. These are foods that contain a chemical that are broken down into uric acid. We will look at these foods later, because by avoiding these foods you can try to avoid getting gout.
- Stopping and starting certain medicines can trigger a gout attack. For example, diuretics (water tablets) can cause gout.
- Taking aspirin on a regular basis may trigger a gout attack.
- Family history – you can inherit the possibility of getting gout; it runs in families.

WHO GETS GOUT?

- Men have a higher risk than women to get gout, especially older men (65 years and older)
- People that are overweight and obese have a much greater risk
- People who carries most of their weight around their tummy – so thin arms and legs but a big tummy (apple shape bodies)
- People with diabetes and high cholesterol

FOOD CULPRITS

The following foods are what is called purine-rich foods that gets broken down to the uric acid that forms the crystals. Gout is called the disease of kings, because most of the foods are very expensive.

- Asparagus
- Cauliflower
- Dried beans
- Veal
- Anchovies
- Mutton
- Mushrooms
- Trout
- Processed meat and bacon
- Liver
- Kidneys
- Oatmeal
- Poultry – Goose, partridge and turkey
- Salmon
- Sardines
- Seafood
- Spinach

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Gout can occur in different joints, but the joint of the big toe is most often affected and account for 50% of all gout attacks. Other joints, such as the heels, knee, wrist and fingers may also be affected.

An acute attack usually begins between two and four in the morning. This is due to the lower body temperature during the night.

The affected joint is generally red, swollen and hot and extremely sensitive to touch! Not even the bed sheet can touch the big toe!

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Water: Increase water intake as it helps to flush the uric acid from the system. Interestingly enough, for once, drinking coffee is a good thing, as the consumption is associated with a lower risk of gout.

Exercise: Exercise is essential for a healthy body. It also helps the kidneys to get rid of the excess uric acid.

Alcohol: Keep alcohol consumption to a minimum, avoid beer, red wine and strong spirits. If possible, avoid alcohol totally. Too many fruit juices can also trigger an attack, especially the juices that are sweetened with sugar.

Diary and fat: Introduce low-fat dairy products into your diet and avoid products such as butter and cream. High cholesterol is one of the risk factors for getting gout, so reduce your fat intake. Choose grilled options instead of frying!

Stop smoking: Smoking reduces blood circulation and will increase the chances of crystals forming in the smaller blood vessels.

TREATMENT

- Cold compression
Putting ice on the affected area several times a day may help to relieve the inflammation.
- Medication
In an emergency, a medicine called colchicine can be bought from the pharmacy. Take two tablets immediately, followed by one tablet every two hours until relief is obtained. The maximum quantity of tablets that can be taken per attack is six and the treatment should not be repeated within three days.
- Anti-inflammatory medicine
The pharmacist or doctor may recommend a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug to help with the inflammation and pain. Improvement can be expected within four hours, and treatment is recommended for the duration of one to two weeks.
- The acidity of the urine can be changed by taking of bicarbonate and citrate salts.

CONCLUSION

Gout is extremely painful! The best thing to do is to try and avoid it. So, forget living like a king! Avoid the alcohol, red meat, prawns and desserts.

Rather drink lots of water, eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, exercise regularly to keep the body weight within the normal range and you will avoid lots of pain!



DISCLAIMER

TAKE NOTE

The information provided in this article is for education purposes only and does not serve as a medical diagnosis. Members should always consult their healthcare provider with serious symptoms.

Please note that Heritage Health plans do not necessarily cover the costs of the condition/s described.

