

Gout: A guide for patients



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- What is gout?
- How is it diagnosed?
- How is it treated?
- How to prevent it!
- When to call your doctor

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What is gout?

- Gout is a form of arthritis
 - “Arthro”= joint, “itis”= inflammation
- Usually affects a single joint
- Comes on rapidly--over hours
- Very painful!!
- Can go away by itself after 3-7 days
- Most commonly affects big toe, ankle, knees

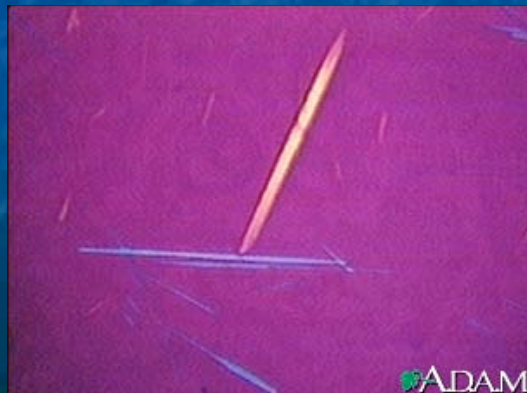
What Causes Gout?

- Gout occurs when there is too much uric acid in the blood. It seeps into the joints and causes a severe inflammation and pain. The uric acid level is affected by hereditary factors, foods/alcohol, and some medications. Attacks often occur when something causes the level to go up or down quickly, which is why certain foods can trigger an attack.

How is Gout diagnosed?

- Typical appearing arthritis of the big toe is sometimes adequate to make the diagnosis
- A high blood uric acid level is generally found but not diagnostic by itself
- Seeing crystals in the fluid taken from the affected joint is the most definitive test, when possible

Here's what the crystals look like under the microscope



ADAM.

How do I Treat a Gout Attack?

- It depends!!
- A typical gout flare must be treated with anti-inflammatory medication. Examples are:
 - Indomethacin, naproxen or ibuprofen
 - Steroid injection in the joint (ouch!, but see next slide)
 - Oral prednisone
 - Oral colchicine

How do I Treat a Gout Attack?

- Start treatment immediately when you feel the attack coming on.
- Treat with higher doses of the medication at first and then lower the dose as the symptoms improve.
- Continue the medication until all the pain and swelling is gone.

Cortisone Injections

- A very effective treatment if only one or 2 joints are inflamed
- Very safe
- May avoid the need for systemic medications
- Hurts, but if done well, not too bad
- May be done by your primary care physician, the orthopedist or rheumatologist

How do I Prevent Gout Attacks?

- Gout is really caused by high uric acid levels in the blood. The best way to prevent gout is to lower the uric acid level to below 6 and keep it there long term.
- Once the uric acid level has been normal for 6-12 months, the gout attacks will usually stop. But the medication to lower uric acid must be continued to keep the level low.

Which Medications Lower Uric Acid?

- Allopurinol: this is the most commonly used medication. The more you take, the lower the uric acid level will be, so we start with a low dose, and increase it until we get your uric acid below 6.
- Probenecid and Febuxostat are other options if the allopurinol causes side effects.

What about Diet?

- Diet does NOT cause gout by itself. Gout is caused by too much uric acid in the blood.
- But some foods do increase uric acid: red meats, shellfish, beer are examples. Eat less of these!!
- Vegetables high in uric acid are probably fine for most people.
- You can reduce gout flares with a good diet but this will not cure the gout by itself.

What if I Still Get Gout Attacks?

- Gout flares can still occur after starting allopurinol (especially the first few months), because there is still uric acid in the joints.
- If an flare occurs, do NOT stop the allopurinol, but treat the acute flare just as you normally do.
- Gout flares can happen when allopurinol is started. You should be on colchicine or indomethacin for a few months after starting allopurinol to reduce the chances of a flare.

Do I have to take the medication forever?

- Yes, because...
- Gout can be essentially 'cured' by keeping the uric acid below 6.
- If you stop the medication, the uric acid will go up again (like it was before treatment).
- And....you should get the uric acid tested periodically to make sure it's still low.

When do I call the Doctor?

- Any time you get a flare and you're not sure what to do, call ASAP to get treated.
- If you develop itching, rash, fever or mouth sores on allopurinol, stop it and call right away (this is an allergy).
- Any time you have a question about the treatment.