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Weekend Doctor

Dr. Thomas F. Vail

Got gout? If so, watch what you eat and drink.

Changes in diet, including overindulging in certain foods and beverages, can cause gout attacks.

Gout, also known as gouty arthritis, is extremely painful. Gout is caused when uric acid accumulates in the tissues or a joint and crystallizes.

Gout most commonly occurs in the big toe joint because it is subject to so much pressure from walking. The big toe is also the coolest part of the body and uric acid is sensitive to temperature changes.

Men are more likely to suffer from a gout attack than women.

A common symptom of gout is waking up in the middle of the night with a throbbing pain in your big toe, which is swollen. The pain lasts about three or four hours and then subsides.

However, pain in the same toe usually returns within a few months.

So how is gout diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms and do a physical exam. He or she might take a fluid sample from your joint to look for uric acid crystals, which is the best way to test for gout.

Your doctor may also do a blood test to measure the amount of uric acid in your blood.

Paying attention to what you eat can help you manage gout.

People prone to gout attacks should avoid purine-rich items such as shellfish, organ meats like kidney and liver, red meat, red wine, and beer.

Other protein compounds in foods, such as lentils and beans, may cause gout.

Eat moderate amounts of a healthy mix of foods to control your weight and get the nutrients you need. In addition, drink plenty of water and other fluids.

If prevention is not enough, gout can be treated with medications, diet changes, increasing consumption of appropriate fluids, and immobilizing the foot.

If you treat gout right away, relief often begins within 24 hours.

To ease pain during a gout attack, rest the joint that hurts. Apply ice or cooling lotions to your toe to ease pain and swelling during an acute attack.

Taking ibuprofen or another anti-inflammatory medicine can also help you feel better. However, don't take aspirin; it can make gout worse by raising the level of uric acid in your blood.

As always, talk to your physician before taking any medications.

To stop a gout attack, your doctor can also give you a shot of corticosteroids, or prescribe a large daily dose of one or more medicines. The doses will get smaller as your symptoms go away.

In some cases, specially-made shoes are prescribed to relieve pain associated with gout.

In severe cases, surgery may be required to remove uric acid crystals and repair the joint.

To prevent future attacks, your doctor may prescribe a medicine to reduce uric acid buildup in your blood.

If your doctor prescribes this medication, take it as directed. Most people continue to take this medicine for the rest of their lives.

Talk to a podiatrist if you have other questions about gout.



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