

ankle&foot

centers of georgia

How to Beat Gout

What is gout? It is an extremely painful condition that usually affects the big toe joints. It has been called the King's disease and was thought to have come from too much good living - rich foods, fine wines, dark liquors, etc. Gout, however, is an inherited condition that causes a build up of uric acid in your body. Uric acid is a by product of your body breaking down food into things it can use. Uric acid comes from purines which are the component parts of a lot of foods we will discuss later. If you have a normal amount of uric acid in your body, it stays dissolved and does not cause any problems.

When you look at a uric crystal under a microscope, it looks like a double edged sword - no wonder it hurts so bad. If you are producing too much uric acid or if your body is not getting rid of it properly, it can build up in your body and start to cause problems. How does this happen? Imagine a glass of water and you add a teaspoon of sugar and stir it up. The sugar dissolves. You cannot see it but you know it is there because you can taste it. If you add six or seven teaspoons, you can stir all day but some of the sugar crystals still settle out to the bottom of the glass. The same thing happens with the uric acid crystals. When there are too many of them, the uric acid crystals settle out into our joints, muscles and other tissues because they cannot be dissolved in our blood.

Why does it most often affect the big toe joint? Let's go back to the glass of water again. Take a cold glass of water and a hot glass of water. The hot water will dissolve more sugar than the cold glass - If you have ever made sweet tea you should know this. As the blood flows down to the feet it leaves the warmth of your body and begins to cool a little. Because the foot is a little cooler than the body, the blood cannot keep the uric acid crystals dissolved so they settle out into the toe joints.

So, how do we treat gout? First, treat the acute attacks? Most people do not even know or suspect they have gout until they have their first attack. It may be discovered on routine blood work which will show an elevation in the uric acid level in your body. There are a lot of medications that can give some relief. These include non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications like Motrin (Advil, Nuprin, Motrin IB), naprosyn (Alleve), and aspirin. There are many other prescription medications as well. All of these work to reduce the inflammation and pain. The oldest and oddest of all the anti-gout medications is colchicine, a drug discovered so long ago the Pharaoh himself may have used it. Colchicine helps gout and just about nothing else. It is so specific that it is used as a test to check for gout. If a patient responds to colchicine he has gout, if not, the doctor should suspect another problem. It would be an ideal treatment except for the side affects - severe nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. It is still used sometimes in very painful attacks.

Second, prevent future attacks. The only way to do this is to keep the uric acid level low. Remember, uric acid comes from purines, which the body obtains in two ways: it manufactures some from non-purine raw materials and absorbs the rest from foods that have purine content. One simple measure to keep uric acid levels low is to avoid purine-rich foods. Here is a short list to memorize:

Very High Purine Content

****Avoid These****

All organ meats (brain, liver kidney, sweetbreads, etc.)
Anchovies
Gravies
Meat Extracts
Salmon and lox
Sardines

Fairly High Purine Content

****Careful With These****

Asparagus and spinach, celery
Beans, peas, lentils
Bran
Beer and alcohol
Fish and seafood - more than 8 oz./day
Meats and poultry - more than 8 oz./day
Mushrooms and radishes
Oatmeal and wheat germ

Low Purine Content

****Enjoy These****

All vegetables except those listed in the second column
Breads and cereals
Eggs
Fats and oils - in moderation
Fish roe - including caviar
Fruits and nuts
Milk and milk products
Sugars, syrups, sweets

You should also increase your fluid intake to dilute the uric acid and help prevent kidney stones caused by the uric acid. A purine restricted diet will only control the amount of uric acid that you take in but not the amount your body makes on its own. Some medication will still be needed to have any significant affect on reducing the uric acid level in your body.

Medications to lower uric acid. Patients who have had gout for many years may call these medications modern miracles. These drugs have changed gout from a disastrous, crippling disease to a relatively minor inconvenience. That can mean the difference between pain and disability, unemployment and a normal active, fully productive life. These drugs work in two ways. Some like Probenecid and sulfinpyrazone help the kidneys to excrete uric acid. Allopurinol, the most widely used, reduces the amount of uric acid the body actually manufactures. Both of these are available only through your doctor and must be used with caution because of side effects and the fact that they can actually cause acute gouty flare ups. Your doctor will discuss this with you more in detail.