

## PATIENT INFORMATION

### Gout

Gout is an inflammatory arthritis caused by a buildup of uric acid crystals in the joints. Uric acid is a chemical that is normally present in the blood. Under some circumstances, uric acid can form into crystals in your joints. This causes joint redness, soreness, and swelling. While this is often painful, it is never life threatening and repeat attacks are common. Rarely, uric acid crystals can form into growths, called tophi, near a joint, causing disfigurement. Gout is treatable and often preventable.

#### ***What causes gout?***

The disease begins with elevated levels of uric acid in the blood. Uric acid is produced by your body when it breaks down certain foods into naturally found substance called purines. These are found in a variety of foods. Causes of an elevated uric acid level include:

- Genetics: Being passed down from your parents.
- Diseases that cause increased uric acid production (obesity, psoriasis, some cancers).
- Medicines: including some chemotherapy, diuretics, and aspirin.
- Chronic kidney disease: The kidneys are no longer able to remove uric acid well.

Conditions strongly associated with gout include:

- Obesity.
- High blood pressure.
- High cholesterol.
- Diabetes.

Foods to avoid or reduce include:

- Alcoholic beverages (all types)
- Some fish, seafood and shellfish
- Red meats, organ meats (like liver)
- Vegetables and beans such as asparagus, kidney beans, lentils, lima beans, mushrooms and spinach

Not everyone with elevated uric acid levels gets gout. It is not understood why some people get gout and others do not. Surgery and joint injury are other factors that can lead to gout.

### ***What are the symptoms of gout?***

Usually, an attack of gout comes on quickly. It causes intense pain with redness, swelling, and warmth in a joint. Rarely, fever can occur. Often, only one joint is involved. Certain joints are more commonly involved including the base of the big toe (most common), foot, knee and ankle.

Without treatment, an attack usually goes away in a few days to weeks. Between attacks, you usually will not have symptoms, which is very different from many other forms of arthritis.

***How is gout diagnosed?*** Your physician will suspect gout based on your symptoms and exam. Removal of fluid from the joint is sometime even done to check for uric acid crystals. Sometimes, blood, urine, and X-ray tests are also used.

### ***How is gout treated?***

There are 2 phases to gout treatment:

1) Treating the sudden onset or acute attack and 2) Preventing attacks, called prophylaxis.

#### **Treatment of an Acute Attack**

- Medicines are used. These include anti-inflammatory medicines or oral steroids.
- An injection of steroid medicine into the affected joint is sometimes necessary.
- The painful joint is rested. Movement can worsen the arthritis.

#### **Treatment to Prevent Attacks**

After the acute attack subsides, your caregiver may advise prophylactic medicine if the acute attacks occur repeatedly. These medicines either help your kidneys eliminate uric acid from your body or decrease your uric acid production. You may need to stay on these medicines for a very long time.

The early phase of treatment with prophylactic medicine can be associated with an increase in acute gout attacks. For this reason, during the first few months of treatment, your caregiver may also advise you to take medicines usually used for acute gout treatment. Be sure you understand your caregiver's directions.