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Gout

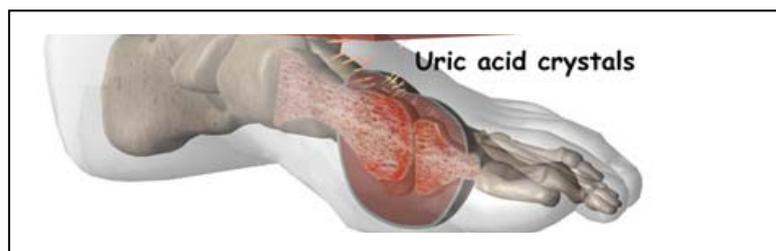
Gout is a disease that involves the build-up of uric acid in the body.

About 95 percent of gout patients are men.

Most men are over 50 when gout first appears.

Women generally don't develop gout until after menopause. But some people develop gout at a young age.

Gout is common in NZ moreso in male Islanders.



What is gout?

Synovial fluid is the fluid that the body produces to lubricate the joints. In gout, excess uric acid causes needle-shaped crystals to form in the synovial fluid. Uric acid is a normal chemical in the blood.

Everyone has some uric acid in his blood. As your immune system tries to get rid of the crystals, it causes the inflammation and pain of arthritis.

The first attack of gouty arthritis usually happens in just one joint. Half of the time, gout affects the **metatarsophalangeal** (MTP) joint. This is the joint at the base of the big toe. Eventually, 90 percent of people with gout will have pain in the MTP joint. Other joints that are commonly affected include the mid-foot, ankle, heel, and knee joints. Less commonly gout affects the fingers, wrists, and elbows.

Over time, patients with gout can develop tophi, or lumps that grow around crystal deposits in joints or near pressure points. Tophi most often occur in the fingers, wrists, ears, knees, elbows, forearms, and heels. Tophi can also grow in the kidneys, heart, and eyes.

Why does gout develop?

The underlying condition that causes gout is called hyperuricemia [high levels of uric acid]

This can happen for two reasons: (1) your body creates too much uric acid, or (2) your kidneys don't excrete the uric acid effectively. Whether or not you will develop gout is related to how bad your hyperuricemia is over time.

For people who create too much uric acid, the cause is usually genetic. Some rare genetic and metabolic disorders can cause overproduction of uric acid, which can eventually lead to gout.

More than 90 percent of people with gout have kidneys that don't effectively get rid of uric acid. Sometimes this is caused by certain kinds of drugs, such as diuretics, cyclosporine, and low-dose aspirin. Other medical conditions, such as obesity, hypertension, and diabetes, can also make some people more likely to develop gout.

Many gout patients have a combination of overproduction and under-excretion of uric acid. Their bodies create too much uric acid and have problems getting rid of it. This combination of problems happens with drinking alcohol, especially beer.

An injury that can trigger gout can be very slight. Even gentle exercise can cause inflammation in the joint, although you may not notice it. Once the joint is at rest, the body absorbs some of the water in the synovial fluid.

Heredity plays a role in gout. In some families [Islander's], hyperuricemia tends to develop into gout, while in other families it doesn't. But genes alone don't account for gout.

There are several risk factors for gout. These include obesity, kidney problems, high hemoglobin levels, high triglyceride levels, and hypertension (high blood pressure). People who eat lots of meat, especially organ meats such as liver and heart, don't exercise, and drink lots of alcohol are also at a higher risk for gout.

What does gout feel like?

1. Gout causes attacks of very painful joint inflammation.
2. Early gout attacks usually affect only one joint. This joint is most commonly the MTP joint at the base of your big toe.
3. The joint becomes swollen, warm, and red within eight to twelve hours.
4. Most of the time the attacks happen at night, and patients say the pain is so bad the joint can't even stand the weight of a sheet.
5. Walking and standing are almost impossible if the legs or feet are affected.
- 6., Many patients have flu-like symptoms, including fever and chills.
7. The pain may go away on its own in a few hours, or it may take a few weeks.
8. Gouty arthritis attacks come and go.
9. Eventually the pain doesn't ever completely go away.
10. Eventually, some patients develop tophi on joints or pressure points and kidney stones.

How do doctors identify the condition?

1. The diagnosis begins with a history of your symptoms and a physical exam.
2. Joint aspiration: look at synovial fluid from the affected joint
3. Blood test to look at the levels of uric acid
4. To rule out: septic arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.
5. X-rays

What can be done for the condition?

Gout cannot be cured, but it can be very successfully treated.

The main goal of treating gout is to get rid of the pain and swelling of gout attacks.

Doctors prescribe medicines called colchicine, certain nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), and corticosteroids to decrease swelling and relieve pain. All of these drugs work quickly and are very effective.

The sooner they are given after an attack starts, the faster the pain goes away. These drugs may be given by mouth, through an intravenous line into your bloodstream, or injected directly into the joint.

Your doctor may also aspirate the affected joint, which involves using a needle to drain some of the synovial fluid. This can immediately decrease the pressure in the joint.

Lifestyle changes can help you manage intermittent gout

Change your diet. Diets that are lower in meat decreases the amount of uric

Quit taking drugs such as diuretics.

Lose weight.

Quit drinking alcohol.

Avoid activities that stress your joints.

Drink plenty of fluids to help your kidneys work more efficiently.

Doctors seldom treat hyperuricemia without symptoms of gout. However, if hyperuricemia is at least moderately bad over several years, it is more likely to lead to gout. In this case, a doctor may begin treatments to prevent gout.