

GOUT

Q: What is gout?

Gout is a form of arthritis that leads to sudden, intense pain and swollen joints that may become red and hot.

More than 50% of gout attacks start in the big toe, but gout can occur in any joint. Knees, ankles, feet and fingers are other common sites.

Gout attacks often occur, without warning, in the middle of the night.


Q: What causes gout?

Gout is caused by a buildup of uric acid, a naturally occurring waste product in the body. Excess uric acid collects when the kidneys aren't able to remove it well enough or when your body overproduces uric acid.

Hereditary factors often lead to the development of gout. Some foods high in purines, such as certain types of fish, red meat, alcohol and sugary drinks, may also contribute by raising uric acid levels in the blood. Certain medications can also trigger gout.

It's best to talk with a gout specialist if you are experiencing any signs of gout.





While gout cannot be cured, it can be successfully managed.

Q: How is gout treated?

There are several approaches to addressing gout, though they vary by patient.

The first involves controlling joint pain. Your doctor may prescribe anti-inflammatory drugs or corticosteroids to help with this.

The second approach involves decreasing the amount of uric acid in your blood. Lowering uric acid levels in the blood can prevent or lessen painful attacks and reduce the risk of gout complications such as kidney disease, increased cardiovascular risks, and the development of tophi, a deposit of uric acid crystals.

It is important to patients to both control joint pain and decrease their uric acid levels to experience relief from gout pain. Doctors may also recommend lifestyle changes that can help reduce symptoms. These include weight loss, reducing alcohol consumption and limiting certain foods.

Q: What types of medication treat a gout attack?

Several types of medication can help to address a gout attack.

To reduce inflammation and pain, health care providers may recommend naproxen, ibuprofen or another NSAID — a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agent. These medications are commonly used for immediate relief during an attack.

Patients may also be prescribed colchicine, a medication used for years to treat gout. Colchicine helps prevent gout attacks.

Health care providers may also prescribe corticosteroids to reduce inflammation and gout pain. They can be administered orally with pills, or intravenously by injection.

What medications help regulate uric acid levels?

There is only one way to manage gout over the long term, and that's by maintaining a healthy uric acid level. Medications aid patients in managing their uric acid level through one of two ways: They reduce the production of uric acid, or they increase the excretion of uric acid.

Patients may be prescribed one of several medications to manage uric acid. The standard first-line treatment is a medication called allopurinol, which works by reducing the body's production of uric acid. Patients may also take febuxostat, a similar medication that's sometimes used for people who don't respond well to allopurinol. Another medication called probenecid helps by aiding the body in clearing uric acid before it builds up.

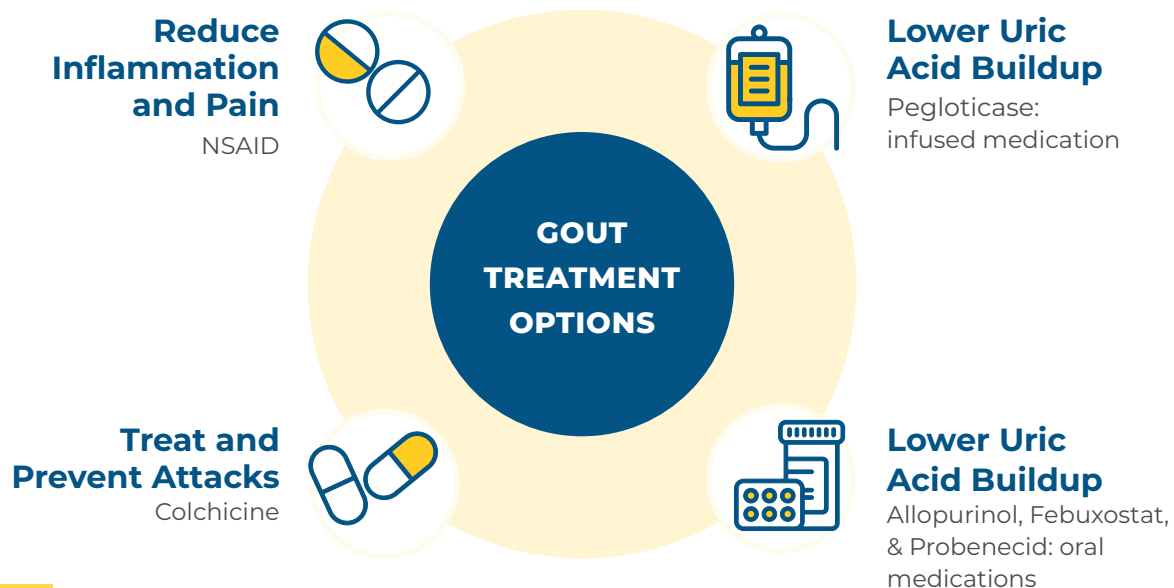
Patients use one or several of these medications to prevent painful attacks by getting uric acid levels to the American College of Rheumatology's recommended level of 6mg/dL.

What if traditional medications don't work?

Some patients discover that their gout persists even after they've tried the medications described.

Health care providers may recommend that these patients try pegloticase, an infused medication designed for people who haven't found success through traditional oral gout medications.

The medication, which is administered via IV every two weeks, converts uric acid into a compound that's easier for the body to excrete. The medication is often administered over a period of months, during which time the large deposits of uric acid that have built up in the body dissolve.



Gout affects more than
12 million
Americans.



Q: Who develops gout?

Though the experience of gout can be isolating, the disease is quite common. Gout affects more than 12 million Americans. While gout primarily affects middle-aged and older men, younger men and women of all ages can have gout — though children almost never have gout.

A family history of gout increases the likelihood of the condition developing, as does being overweight. One misconception is that only people who eat poorly or drink alcohol in excess suffer from gout. In fact, people who eat healthy food and refrain from alcohol can still develop the condition.

Certain communities of color are more likely to be affected by gout. They are also less likely to receive quality care.

For example, gout is most common among Black Americans, who are two-to-three times more likely to develop gout than are white Americans. Asian Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders also face a higher risk of gout.

People with kidney disease are far more likely to develop gout. They also have a number of treatment limitations, so patients should consult with their health care providers to determine what treatment works for them.

Q: How does gout impact people and society?

Gout's painful attacks can be debilitating. It is common for gout patients to have trouble walking, climbing stairs or completing everyday tasks like caring for family members or doing household chores.

Gout also impacts patients' workplaces and communities. Not treating gout can result in attacks that are more frequent or longer in duration. One study found that employees who suffered more than three gout attacks annually, as compared to those who experienced fewer than three, had increased emergency department and urgent care visits. They also had greater short-term disability costs.

Q: Should I tell my family and friends I have gout?

Misconceptions about gout can make people reluctant to talk about their condition with family and friends. But open communication is important. You might start by explaining that gout is a form of severe arthritis that can be caused by different factors. This information may help change people's perception of the condition.

It's also important to share your experience so that you have family and friends' support – not only during a painful attack, but also as you work toward a new diet or exercise regime, should your doctor recommend these lifestyle changes.

Gout can be painful and debilitating—
but also treatable. Working with a health care
provider to establish a treatment plan can allow
you to meet the disease's challenges.



REFERENCES

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About Alliance For Gout Awareness

The Alliance for Gout Awareness works to reduce stigma and empower patients by improving public understanding of gout. Members collaborate on educational materials and support resources.

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