

YOUR GOUT QUESTIONS ANSWERED

How Gout Affects the Whole Body



Perspective from **ANDREW LAZAR, MD**

People often equate gout with joint pain. Is that perception accurate?

It's incomplete. Gout is a systemic disease, meaning that it affects the entire body. So we're not talking about just one joint or one organ or one body part.

People may be surprised to learn, for example, that gout can cause vascular and kidney damage too.

How does uric acid buildup affect the body?

Urate crystals cause gout in the joints, as many people know. But those crystals can also deposit in the kidneys, heart, eyes and prostate. The disease can present itself anywhere in the body.

This is especially true throughout the vascular system. If you think about it, our entire body is connected by blood vessels. The kidneys are the body's largest blood filtration system. So, if there is uric acid buildup in the blood vessels, some patients experience uric acid buildup in the kidney arteries.

That means people with gout have a higher risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

How do patients know if their gout is causing organ disease?

Some symptoms of gout are impossible to miss – excruciating pain in the joints, most

commonly in the foot or big toe. What's trickier sometimes is pinpointing the symptoms of other uric acid-related organ diseases.

For example, patients rarely notice symptoms of kidney failure, which often don't materialize until late in the disease. But gout can still be damaging patients' kidneys, even if that damage goes undetected.

That's just one example. Elevated uric acid levels are associated with many comorbidities. So, it's important for clinicians to treat gout as a systemic disease and ask questions about a patient's full medical history. It is also important for patients to be forthcoming with providers about their medical history – and to get their uric acid levels under control.

Some gout patients try to "tough it out" rather than seeking treatment. What advice would you offer?

Without proper treatment, the condition will only get worse. Gout can not only cause deterioration in your joints but also affect major organs like the heart, liver, eyes and kidneys. We're talking about kidney disease, cardiovascular disease – serious conditions. Once patients seek treatment for gout, however, their risk of these diseases decreases dramatically.

Patients have to advocate for themselves and make wise decisions that protect their health.