



PODIATRY

FootScope

A foot health message from
Proactive Podiatry

Gout

Gout is a form of arthritis and in fact is sometimes referred to as the most painful form of arthritis. Symptoms of gout include sudden onset of severe pain, commonly in the joint of the big toe, although gout can affect any joint. Gout is caused by a build-up of uric acid in the bloodstream. If the body produces too much uric acid or is unable to excrete uric acid through the kidneys, the acid can form into small crystals in the joints that can be extremely painful when a bout occurs and potentially damaging to the joint over time if left untreated.



The body produces uric acid when purine chemicals can't be broken down. Purine is found in high levels in a number of foods, including fish such as salmon, trout, tuna, cod and sardines, along with liver or other animal organs and beef, among other things. Purines are also present in high quantities in alcohol, particularly in beer, which has been shown to increase risk of gout by 50%. Caffeine can also increase the risk due to dehydrating effects that impair the body's ability to break down purines.

Men, the elderly and people who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop gout simply because these groups are more likely to have higher levels of purines in their systems. The levels are high enough that they can't be broken down naturally and are ultimately converted into uric acid. This problem is confounded when the uric acid produced by purines is unable to be secreted by the kidneys, so

people with kidney disorders or associated problems such as diabetes or high cholesterol are more likely to develop the uric acid crystals.

Not only do people with pre-existing conditions have a higher chance of developing gout but, if you develop gout without a pre-existing illness, your risk of developing an illness such as diabetes or heart disease is increased. Kidney function is affected when they are forced to work double-time to rid the body of a uric acid overload. While your podiatrist can suggest medication for immediate pain relief and to reduce swelling, lifestyle changes are the best cure for gout and the crystals that cause pain in the joints can actually be dissolved once uric acid levels are lowered in the blood stream. That means cutting purines from your diet and taking measures such as decreasing caffeine consumption and losing weight to both limit the amount of purines in the bloodstream in the first place and also turn around kidney function to clear out uric acid before it becomes a problem. For cases of chronic gout, medication can be prescribed that will help to dissolve the crystals; this option works well in combination with lifestyle changes for severe cases.

Top tips for gout prevention

If you have suffered from gout in the past and are trying to prevent a future attack, or if you are concerned about developing gout due to a pre-existing illness or a family history of the condition, there are steps that you can take to decrease your risk.

1. Lose weight: people who are obese or overweight are more likely to develop gout due to higher levels of purine and thus uric acid in the bloodstream, and potentially sluggish kidneys that may be struggling to secrete chemicals from the body. Losing weight will decrease the levels of nasty chemicals in your bloodstream and will also take the pressure off your organs, allowing the kidneys properly eliminate purines from the body before they have a chance to develop into anything harmful.

2. Recognise the risks: if you suffer from a condition such as diabetes or heart disease, or from a disorder that inhibits kidney function, such as long-term kidney disease, your risk of gout is higher than the general population. Likewise, if your parents or other family

members have suffered from gout, or if you have had a gout attack in the past, your chance of having an attack is higher. If you know you are at risk, make sure you have made other lifestyle changes to keep gout at bay.

3. Look at your diet: try to cut foods from your diet that are high in purines. The most common culprits include salmon, tuna, trout, sardines, cod, beef, calf's liver and other animal organs. While these foods all have high levels of purines and are big contributors to gout, even foods low in purines but eaten on a regular basis can cause problems. In fishing villages where shellfish — which is low in purine — is central to the diet, gout is



more common due to regular intake at low levels in the absence of a balanced diet. Eat a healthy balance of fruits and vegetables while limiting purines to truly decrease the risk of a gout attack.

4. Cut the booze: a beer a day does not keep the doctor away. In fact, a beer a day has been shown to increase the likelihood of gout in men by up to 50%.

5. Limit caffeine: large quantities of caffeine, whether from diet soft drinks or from coffee or tea, are dehydrating and limit the body's ability to process chemicals. The kidneys in particular need water to help to flush uric acid out of your system.

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