



GOUT

Symptoms & Statistics

Although the big toe is a common place for it to start, the painful aching of gout can be felt in joints almost any part of the body, but never in the spine

Gout is often extremely painful and it is by no means rare. It affects 16 men in every 1000, but is less common in women (3 in every 1000), who rarely suffer from it before the menopause.

Take plenty of

- Water, fresh fruit and vegetables

Avoid

- Excessive amounts of alcohol
- Offal, game, sardines and shellfish
- Aspirin-based drugs

A type of ARTHRITIS, gout is caused by a defect in the lower body's ability to metabolise uric acid. The result is an accumulation of uric acid crystals in the joints, causing pain and inflammation. Typically a single joint is involved, most commonly the base of the big toe, although the knees, wrists and ankles can also be affected.

The precise causes of gout are uncertain, but there is often a family history. Overindulgence in food and alcohol does not cause gout, but these may trigger an attack. Gout is also commonly associated with OBESITY, especially with a build-up of fat in the abdominal cavity.

Treating Gout

Gout is diagnosed when a blood test reveals high levels of uric acid and a single joint is affected. Patients are usually prescribed drugs to increase the excretion of uric acid and so slow the formation of the crystals. Aspirin should be avoided as it causes retention of uric acid and interferes with the potency of the prescribed drugs. Anti-inflammatories, such as ibuprofen, can reduce the symptoms.

Controlling body weight, through a well-planned programme of exercise and diet, can also help to relieve gout; however, fasting can precipitate an attack. Gout sufferers should take plenty of fluids to help prevent the build-up of excess uric crystals, which may also, cause kidney stones. They should also eat plenty of fresh fruit and green

leafy vegetables for potassium, which aids excretion of uric acid by keeping the urine alkaline. Eating 225g (8oz) of fresh or tinned cherries a day can help to lower blood levels of uric acid. In traditional medicine, leeks are used to treat gout; celery is recommended for its anti-inflammatory action.

Purines.

People who suffer from gout are generally put on a course of drugs, but they may also be advised to cut down on foods that are high in purines since high intakes of these foods can increase levels of uric acid in the blood, causing uric acid salts to be deposited in the joints. High-purine foods include offal, game, anchovies, sardines, poultry, shellfish, and pulses. Low-purine foods include fruit and fruit juices, nuts, dairy produce, eggs and vegetables – with the exception of asparagus, cauliflower, peas, spinach and mushrooms.

Fish Oils.

Research studies have found that omega-3 fatty acids can decrease the body's output of inflammatory compounds. Gout sufferers may find that fish-oil supplements, which contain omega-3 fatty acids, can offer some relief for painful swelling of the joints.

Asparagus.

Although rich source of folate and a useful source of beta-carotene, vitamin C and E, diuretic and mild laxative. Its major drawback is it contains purines, which may precipitate an attack of gout.

Celery.

May help to lower cholesterol levels and blood pressure, low in calories and a good source of potassium, helps to relieve joints in pain. Celery contains an anti-inflammatory agent, which can help to alleviate the painful symptoms of gout, caused by the build up of uric acid crystals in the joints. Indeed, herbalists often advise people with gout to drink a tea brewed from celery seeds. The seeds, which can be bought at health food shops, also contain oil, which acts as a natural tranquilliser. Drawback is it may be high in nitrates.

Cherries

A good source of potassium and may help to prevent gout. The raw edible varieties of cherries are a good source of potassium, which helps to stabilise the heartbeat and keep the skin healthy. They also contain useful amounts of vitamin C.

First brought to Britain by the Romans, cherries have been growing here since AD100. They are valued in natural medicine for their cleansing properties – the fruit is believed to remove toxins and fluids and cleanse the kidneys. Their mild laxative action can help to relieve constipation. Eat – fresh or canned 225g (8oz) per day – will also lower levels of uric acid in the blood, which may help to prevent gout.

Leeks.

Useful source of potassium and folate. In traditional medicine, leeks have been used to treat a variety of ailments, ranging from sore throats to gout and kidney stones. Because they contain potassium – one leek contains the equivalent of an eighth of an adult's daily need of the mineral – leeks encourage the efficient functioning of the kidneys and are effective as a diuretic. They are also a useful source of folate, and one portion of cooked leeks contains almost a third of an adult's recommended daily intake.

Common Pulses

Pulses are also moderately high in purines so should be avoided by people who suffer from gout.

Soups.

People who suffer from gout should choose soups made with vegetable stocks if possible. This is because meat stocks may contain high levels of purines, which raise the amount of uric acid in the body – and uric crystals cause the painful joints experienced by people with gout.

Kiwi Fruit.

Excellent source of vitamin C. Good source of potassium and supplies soluble fibre, which can help to lower blood cholesterol levels. A single kiwi supplies more than the normal daily requirement for the vitamin, which is essential for wound healing and a healthy immune system. The potassium helps to counteract the high sodium content in a typical western diet, and has been linked to healthy blood pressure.