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**DIET CENTER**

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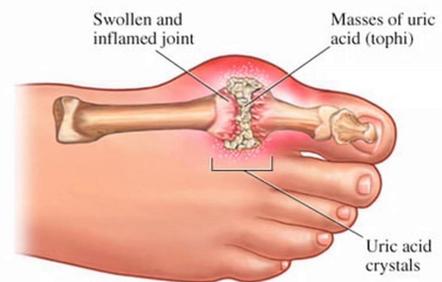
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## What is Gout?

Gout is the most common form of inflammatory arthritis in men over 40 and affects approximately 3 times as many men as women. The pain of gout (called attacks or flares) is caused by inflammation when needle-like crystals of uric acid are deposited in connective tissue and/or in the fluid that cushions the joint (the synovial fluid). An attack usually starts with sudden, severe pain, tenderness, redness, warmth, and swelling in the large joint of the big toe. Other joints may include the instep, ankles, heels, knees, wrists, fingers, and elbows. Rarely, the shoulders, hips, or spine may be affected. After about 3-10 days, the attack usually subsides, and the next one may not happen for months or even years. But over time, the gout attacks can become more severe, last longer, affect more than one joint, and occur more often.

Uric acid is a substance produced when the body breaks down purines (chemicals) found in human tissue and many foods we eat. Most uric acid is carried through the bloodstream to the kidneys, which eliminate it from the body in the urine. However, if the body produces too much uric acid, or if the kidneys don't eliminate enough of it, uric acid can build up in the blood. This condition is called hyperuricemia. Most people with hyperuricemia (high levels of uric acid in the blood) never get gout. But, if uric acid crystals form, a painful gout attack can occur at any time.



Gout can progress, eventually causing damage to joints, potentially leading to disability. However, with proper treatment, most people with gout are able to control their symptoms. Treatment may include different kinds of medication to ease the painful attacks, to prevent future attacks, and to help prevent long-term damage to the joints and related disability.

### What Really Causes Gout?

There's a common belief that poor diet "causes" gout. Some people may even feel that gout is something they brought on themselves by overindulging in certain foods or by drinking alcohol. In truth, anyone who has consistently high levels of uric acid in the blood is at risk of having a gout attack. Although it's true that some foods

(such as certain types of meat and shellfish) and alcoholic beverages add to your body's pool of uric acid, these are just two among many factors, some of which you can control and others which you can't.

Although none of these factors alone may cause hyperuricemia, each may contribute to the problem. When coupled with a reduced ability of the kidneys to eliminate uric acid, the condition called hyperuricemia can develop—potentially leading to gout.

Obesity/being overweight	Certain medicines including:
Gender (more common in men)	- diuretics
Certain foods and alcoholic beverages	- aspirin at certain doses
Genetics	- niacin
Enzyme defect	- cyclosporine
Exposure to lead	- levodopa

No one can predict when an attack might occur for someone with hyperuricemia. It may be triggered by something you eat or drink, or it may be triggered by certain medicines, the presence of an illness, stressful events, or some other factor. Many times, it may be difficult to say what triggered a specific attack.

### **The Role of Diet**

Changing your diet *may* help, but keep in mind that, a low-purine diet may not have a very large impact on the level of uric acid in the blood. A more realistic approach is to maintain a healthy balanced diet, avoiding foods that are high in purines. Additionally, reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is imperative since obesity is one of several conditions commonly associated with gout.

### **Gout-Friendly Foods**

Though many people misunderstand the role of diet in gout, there are some well-established, research-based guidelines that may be helpful:

- Drink plenty of liquid daily to avoid dehydration.
- Include low-fat dairy products in your diet. Eating more of these dairy products is associated with a decreased risk of gout.
- Include low-purine choices to your diet, including carbonated beverages, coffee, cereals, chocolate, fruits, breads and cereals that are not whole-grain, grains, pasta, rice, olives, cheese, eggs, milk products, sugar, tomatoes, and some types of green vegetables.

### **Items to Avoid**

To reduce high-purine foods in your diet, you may find the following guidelines helpful:

- Limit your consumption of certain types of meat that are particularly high in purines: beef, pork, lamb, and organ meats (such as liver, kidney, and brain), as well as meat extracts and gravies.
- Reduce or eliminate alcohol consumption, especially beer.

- Reduce your use of oatmeal, dried beans, peas, lentils, spinach, asparagus, cauliflower, and mushrooms.
- High consumption of seafood is associated with an increased risk of gout. Specific types of seafood found to be associated with higher levels of uric acid include: anchovies, sardines, roe (fish eggs), herring, mussels, codfish, scallops, trout, and haddock.

Each person is different, and each person's gout deserves individual attention. Speak to your physician, and be sure to mention **every** medication you are taking—including prescription drugs, aspirin and other medications you may buy at the drug store or supermarket, herbs, natural supplements, vitamins, and anything else that you take to affect your health.

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