

Gout

Gout is an ancient form of inflammatory arthritis that is becoming increasingly common, mostly due to changing lifestyle habits.

What is Gout?

Gout is a joint disease resulting from deposits of uric acid crystals in tissues and fluids within the body. This process is caused by an uncontrolled metabolic disorder, called Hyperuricemia, in which there

is an overproduction or under excretion of uric acid. Uric acid comes from purines, a substance found in many kinds of foods, as well as alcohol and some medications.

Hyperuricemia is not the same as gout, though it is a common cause of it. Other causes include diabetes, kidney disease, obesity, anemia (low blood count), and blood cancers like leukemia. Gout can also run in families. Men between the ages of 30 and 50, as well as women in menopause are most commonly affected.

Signs and Symptoms

Intense cases of gout will typically appear as red, hot, and swollen joints with excruciating pain. This will usually begin in lower extremities, such as the knee, ankle, or big toe. In fact, 80% of all people with gout develop problems in the podagra, the joint of the big toe.

Recurrent bouts of acute gout can lead to a degenerative form of chronic arthritis called gouty arthritis, which damages joints and reduces motion.



An increased likelihood or occurrence of kidney stones is another symptom. In fact, severe complications with gout can often lead to kidney problems as well. People with gout may also get tophi, which are lumps of urate crystals deposited in soft tissue, usually in cooler areas of the body such as the elbows, ears, and some finger joints.

Risk Factors

Aside from being hereditary, most cases of gout are due to lifestyle. Risk factors include being overweight or obese, high blood pressure, high alcohol intake (particularly of beers and spirits), and a diet rich in meat and seafood.

Treatment and Prevention:

Therapy for the acute flaring of the joints consists of anti-inflammatory drugs and steroids. Changes to diet and lifestyle are the easiest and most important remedies. Losing weight, avoiding alcohol, and cutting back on meat, seafood, and fatty oils may help prevent future attacks or reduce existing ones.

Changing medications or stopping the use of substances associated with hyperuricemia may also help. Preventive therapy to lower blood uric acid levels in persons with recurrent acute flares or chronic gout usually involves specific drugs. Even though some cases of gout aren't preventable,

the symptoms can be reduced. Talk to your doctor about your risk for gout and what you can do about it.

Learn more at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001459/>

HIGHLIGHTS

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