

Gout: Patient Education Handout

Gout is a common and complex form of arthritis that can affect anyone. It is characterized by sudden, severe attacks of pain, swelling, redness, and tenderness in the joints — most often in the joint at the base of the big toe. These attacks can occur suddenly, often waking you up in the middle of the night with the sensation that your big toe is on fire.

What Causes Gout?

Gout occurs when urate crystals accumulate in your joint, causing the inflammation and intense pain of a gout attack. Urate crystals can form when you have high levels of uric acid in your blood. Your body produces uric acid when it breaks down purines — substances that are found naturally in your body, as well as in certain foods.

What to Avoid with Gout

To help prevent gout attacks, avoid or limit the following foods and beverages known to increase uric acid levels or trigger inflammation:

- **Red meats** and **organ meats** such as liver, kidney, and sweetbreads
- **Seafood**, especially shellfish (shrimp, lobster, crab) and oily fish (anchovies, sardines, herring, mackerel)
- **Sugary beverages**, particularly sodas and fruit drinks with high-fructose corn syrup
- **Alcohol**, especially beer and hard liquors, which can interfere with uric acid elimination
- **Certain vegetables** high in purines, such as spinach, asparagus, cauliflower, and mushrooms (note: these have a milder effect than meats)
- **Legumes** such as lentils, peas, and beans — although moderate intake may be acceptable for many patients
- **Fruits high in fructose**, like apples, pears, and grapes — consume in moderation
- **Processed and fast foods** rich in trans fats and refined carbohydrates

Lifestyle Recommendations

Here are general guidelines to help manage and prevent gout flares:

- Stay well hydrated — drink plenty of water daily
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Choose low-fat dairy products
- Limit intake of sugary and processed foods
- Exercise regularly

When to See a Rheumatologist

You should consider seeing a rheumatologist if you experience any of the following:

- Frequent or severe gout attacks
- Joint damage or persistent joint pain between attacks
- Uncertainty about the diagnosis
- Difficulty controlling uric acid levels with lifestyle and medication
- Development of tophi (lumps under the skin from urate crystals)

Treatment Options

Treatment typically involves medication to manage pain and inflammation during an acute attack, and medications to lower uric acid levels to prevent future attacks. Common medications include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), colchicine, corticosteroids, and urate-lowering therapy such as allopurinol or febuxostat.

If you think you may have gout or have been diagnosed and need help managing symptoms, please consult your podiatrist or primary care provider for further guidance.

Natural Alternatives for Gout Management

In addition to medical treatment and lifestyle changes, some natural remedies may help reduce the frequency and severity of gout attacks. Always consult your healthcare provider before starting any supplement or alternative therapy.

- **Tart Cherry Juice**: May help lower uric acid levels and reduce inflammation.
- **Vitamin C Supplements**: Can aid in lowering uric acid levels when taken regularly.
- **Magnesium**: A mineral that may be helpful in reducing gout symptoms in some individuals.
- **Ginger**: Known for its anti-inflammatory properties; can be used as tea or a topical compress.
- **Celery Seed Extract**: Traditionally used to help reduce inflammation and support joint health.
- **Nettle Tea**: An herbal remedy believed to reduce pain and inflammation.
- **Apple Cider Vinegar**: Though evidence is limited, some believe it may support metabolic balance.