

Gout



What Is Gout?

Gout is a type of arthritis that causes swelling, pain and burning in joints like the big toe. It happens when there is too much uric acid in your body. Too much uric acid can cause crystals to form in the joints causing pain and swelling.

While anyone can develop gout, it is more likely to occur in:

- Middle-aged men
- Women after menopause
- People who are overweight
- People taking certain medicines, such as water pills
- People with certain diseases, such as diabetes and kidney problems
- People who eat certain foods, including red meat and organ meat, and people who drink alcohol



What Are the Warning Signs of Gout?

The signs and symptoms of gout usually happen suddenly, without warning, and at night. This is called an "attack." Signs of an attack include:

- Severe joint pain, often in the big toe
- Joint pain in other parts of your feet and in your ankles, knees, hands, and wrists
- Swelling, redness, stiffness, and tenderness in the affected joints

Pain is most severe in the first 24 hours. You may have some discomfort for a few days or weeks after the severe pain goes away. If you get gout attacks in the future, they may last longer and affect more joints.



How Is Gout Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and examine your joints.
- Your doctor will take a small sample of fluid from an affected joint to look for signs of gout under a microscope.
- Blood testing and X-rays can help rule out other causes for joint pain.



How Is Gout Treated?

- Treatment is first about relieving pain and stopping the attack. This includes pain killers and medicines to reduce swelling and pain.
- If you have repeated gout attacks, long-term treatment includes preventing future attacks and complications. Complications can include joint and kidney damage. Your doctor may prescribe medicines that help prevent the buildup of uric acid.
- Lifestyle changes can help, too. These include: losing weight if you are overweight, avoiding certain foods, limiting alcoholic drinks, and drinking lots of water.

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Questions for My Doctor

- What treatment is best for me?
- When will my symptoms go away?
- Am I at risk for long-term joint damage?
- What lifestyle changes can I make to prevent gout?
- Do any of the medicines I take increase my level of uric acid?
- What can happen if my gout is left untreated?
- How can I reduce my future risk for gout?
- If my gout is diet-related, what foods should I avoid?



Bottom Line

- Gout occurs when uric acid builds up in or around your joints. Gout usually affects the big toe joint.
- Symptoms include intense pain, swelling, redness, and tenderness in the affected joints.
- To diagnose gout, your doctor will take a small sample of fluid from an affected joint and look for signs of gout.
- Treatment may include pain relievers and other medicines to help reduce swelling and block uric acid buildup.
- Lifestyle changes may also help, including weight loss, limiting alcoholic drinks, and avoiding foods that increase risk for gout.

For More Information

- **MedlinePlus:** www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/gout.html
- **Arthritis Foundation:** www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/gout/
- **National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:** www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Gout/gout_ff.asp

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