

Gout - Ouch!

One of my clients had gout, a form of arthritis. He asked for causes and treatment options.

Uric acid, a normal waste product of metabolism, usually dissolves in the blood and passes through the kidneys and out of the body in the urine. If the uric acid level in the blood is too high to excrete completely, the body deposits uric acid crystals in joints and other tissues. The sharp crystals cause inflammation of the joint lining and pain.

Gout most commonly affects the joint of the great toe, although it can attack any joint in the body. An attack can come on suddenly, cause great pain for 5 to 10 days and then disappear.

I discovered that excess uric acid could be a chronic problem that only reaches gout stage occasionally but may be steadily causing damage to joint tissue. Excess uric acid can contribute to kidney stones and other kidney damage and is more likely to occur in people with high blood pressure.

Blood tests to diagnose gout can be inconclusive and several other conditions have similar symptoms. That does not sound like the medical field has a very good handle on gout, to me.

There are some drugs, allopurinol and colchicine, used to treat gout by inhibiting the formation of uric acid but they have serious side effects. Yikes! Skin eruptions, liver toxicity, inflammation of blood vessels, kidney damage, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, weakness, hair loss and abnormal bleeding do not sound any better than an incredibly painful toe.

I discovered four lifestyle changes that can help significantly.

Obtain and maintain a healthy weight. Gradual weight loss will lessen the load on affected weight-bearing joints. Losing weight may also decrease uric acid levels. Avoid fasting or rapid weight loss because doing so may temporarily raise uric acid levels.

Reduce consumption of animal protein. Since uric acid is a waste product of metabolizing protein, reducing protein in the diet can decrease the blood level of uric acid. Organ meats (liver, brains, kidney and sweetbreads), anchovies, sardines, herring mackerel, broths and gravies, asparagus and mushrooms are particularly high in purines so avoid eating them.

Limit or avoid alcohol. Consuming too much alcohol can inhibit the excretion of uric acid, which in turn can lead to gout. Limit alcohol as a regular habit but during a gout attack, it is best to avoid it completely.

Drink plenty of liquids. Fluids help dilute uric acid in your blood and urine, so be sure you get enough water, 10 to 12 eight-ounce glasses and other fluids every day.

I moved my search to natural health resources and found some other possible causes to consider, a longer list of things to avoid (naturally!), some prevention strategies and some interesting folk remedies for gout. These things sound harmless but remember to check with a medical professional before trying them out.

Possible Causes

- Food allergies may lead to gout. When people who are sensitive to certain foods eliminate them from their diet, many find that their gout goes away.
- Stress raises uric acid levels.
- Surgery causes stress.
- Injury causes stress.
- Candida encourages one to consume too much sugar, which raises acidity.
- Vitamin deficiency, especially B5, A and E, can contribute to the formation of excess uric acid.
- Chemotherapy - uric acid levels increase due to the cellular destruction.
- Hypothyroidism is often involved with gout.
- A drop in barometric pressure may trigger an attack.
- Poor kidney function or Kidney failure may make it more difficult to rid the body of uric acid, thereby triggering gout.
- Diseases such as leukemia, multiple myeloma and psoriasis are associated with gout.
- Recent research indicates that lead poisoning may be another possible cause.
- Severe dieting or fasting temporarily raises uric acid levels.
- Medication for weight loss or heart disease, insulin, some antibiotics, medication for rheumatoid arthritis can cause uric acid levels to rise.
- Diuretics reduce sodium, magnesium, calcium and potassium (among other things) levels causing uric acid to rise.

Things to Avoid

- Meat: organ meats, offal, meat extracts, veal, bacon, sweetbreads, meat gravies and broths, consommé/bullion
- Poultry: turkey, goose
- Seafood: salmon, mackerel, trout, cod, herring, sardines, anchovies, mussels, crab, shrimp
- Vegetables: peas, beans, lentils, asparagus, mushrooms, cooked spinach, rhubarb, cauliflower
- Yeast products: baked goods, beer
- Alcohol
- Coffee - it accelerates the breakdown of protein into uric acid
- All fried foods - they cause a depletion of vitamin E, which can cause uric acid to rise
- Cream and ice cream
- Rich desserts
- Spices
- Pastries
- Simple sugars, simple carbohydrates and saturated fats - they increase your body's production of uric acid and impair your kidneys' ability to get rid of it. Eliminate fructose (found in food and drinks, like sodas)
- White flour

- Aspirin can raise uric acid levels. If you need to use painkillers, only use ones with ibuprofen.
- Oatmeal
- Whole grains
- Caffeine - it impairs kidney function

Prevention

- Potassium makes the acid crystals go into solution for elimination. To increase potassium (the recommended intake is 3,500 mg, but it is safe to take considerably more) take supplements or eat foods high in potassium such as baked potato, with skin (844), 1 cup cooked spinach (838), 1 cup dried peaches (784), 1 medium avocado (604), 1 cup cantaloupe (494), 1 cup boiled lima beans (478), medium banana (451), 1 cup orange juice (436), 15 raw baby carrots (420), 1 cup of skim milk (406), 1 cup nonfat yogurt (390), 1 cup non-salted tomato sauce (350), 4 oz. lean hamburger (349), 1 cup canned kidney beans (329), yams, dried prunes, etc. If you eat enough of these fruits and vegetables, you will not need to take a potassium supplement.
- One of the best ways to prevent gout is to drink at least 6-8 eight-ounce glasses of water daily. This will keep your urine diluted and will help your body excrete uric acid and prevent crystals from forming.
- The flavonoid quercetin inhibits uric acid production in a similar fashion to commonly prescribed drugs for gout.
- Bromelain helps reduce inflammation.
- Sex prevents men from getting gout. It seems that increased sexual activity reduces uric acid levels in fertile men.
- Lemon juice prevents gout attacks by stimulating the formation of calcium carbonate in the body. Calcium carbonate neutralizes acids in the body, including uric acid that triggers gout attacks. After each meal, drink the juice of one freshly squeezed lemon in a glass of lukewarm water
- A teaspoon of baking soda, in a glass of water, with meals will prevent gout attacks by helping to alkalize the body.
- A high fiber diet aids in the elimination of uric acid.
- Fish oil reduces inflammation.
- Shark cartilage used on a daily basis can make the pain disappear.
- Vitamin C helps lower serum uric acid levels.

Folk Remedies

- Alfalfa is a good source of minerals and other nutrients that help reduce serum uric acid.
- Apple cider vinegar (ACV) - Add some rose hips to vinegar and boil; dab on affected area. You may need to apply this mixture several times a day for a few weeks. The vinegar changes the blood pH so that the crystals will go into solution for excretion. Mix two teaspoons each of apple cider vinegar and raw honey in a glass of water and drink at mealtime. Soak the foot in a mixture of 1 cup of ACV and three cups of hot water.
- Bilberry is high in flavonoids, which are helpful in overcoming gout.
- Black cherry juice Get some natural, concentrated black cherry juice and drink several tablespoons of the concentrate daily, mixed with water. Expect relief in 48 hours.

- Black cohosh moderates blood acidity.
- Blueberries are high in anti-inflammatory compounds.
- Castor oil packs Soak a piece of white flannel in warm castor oil, wring it out and place over the affected area; cover with plastic wrap and apply a heating pad. Do this for one hour twice daily.
- Cayenne pepper Boil one tablespoon of pepper in 1 cup of vinegar and 1 cup of water and dab onto the painful joint.
- Charcoal Take 1 teaspoon of activated charcoal daily. Make a poultice using 1 cup of activated charcoal, 3 tablespoons of ground flaxseed and warm water to draw out the toxins.
- Cherries If you are lucky enough to have fresh cherries, eating 6-8 cherries daily will relieve the symptoms of gout. Frozen and canned cherries may also be used. When you feel an attack coming on, eat 20-30 cherries immediately. Cherries have an enzyme that neutralizes uric acid and high antioxidant properties as well as anti-inflammatory action. For greatest effectiveness, eat them between meals.
- DMSO (dimethylsulfoxide) is very effective in relieving pain and swelling caused by inflammation. It helps dissolve crystalline deposits.
- Garlic Eat several cloves of raw garlic daily. Mince the garlic and add it to black cherry juice for a potent remedy.
- Grapes are alkaline which lessens the acidity of uric acid and aid in its elimination from the body.
- Spearmint Make a poultice of spearmint leaves and wrap the affected area.
- Strawberries Eating a cup of strawberries with each meal should bring quick relief. They neutralize uric acid.
- Ice Apply an ice pack for ten minutes, and then alternate with a moist hot-towel compress, to soothe and numb the pain.
- Red clover has traditionally been one of the standard remedies for gout, as well as removing toxins from the body and treating psoriasis, eczema and hot flashes. Studies have shown that red clover may thin the blood, so patients who are also taking an anticoagulant medication should not use it.

Well, I found a lot of interesting information. In my opinion, since the traditional medical diagnosis is so iffy and the medications have such nasty side effects, the natural route makes a lot of sense. Traditional medicine has a short list of foods to avoid and dangerous drugs to treat the rest of the problems. Natural practitioners present a longer list of foods to avoid but the preventative measures and folk remedies seem sensible and tasty.

Both modalities seem to agree that excess uric acid is the problem and that alkalizing the body is the goal. Both agree that drinking more water is a key component of good health.

I am going to get another glass of lemon-water and some more cherries!

http://www.health911.com/remedies/rem_gout.htm

<http://www.acumedico.com/purine.htm>

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=56501>

<http://www.arthritis.org/AFStore/StartRead.asp?idProduct=3323>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/gout/DS00090/DSECTION=1>

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