

Gout

Gout is a type of arthritis that usually affects the joints of the legs and feet, but it can also involve other joints. Although gout can be inherited, it can be caused by other diseases, or by certain medications. Gout is more common in men than in women, especially those over the age of 40. And it often strikes people who are overweight or drink too much alcohol.

Gout results from the buildup of excess uric acid in the blood. Uric acid is a normal waste product that passes out of the body in the urine. But sometimes, the kidneys are unable to remove enough uric acid, so it remains in the blood. This can result in deposits of uric acid crystals forming in the joints, or in other places, such as the kidneys.

The symptoms of gout include a sudden onset of burning pain, stiffness, and swelling, most commonly in the big toe, ankle, knee, wrist, or elbow. The skin in the area of the joint may become so sensitive that anything touching it is painful. In addition, with gout you may experience fever and a general feeling of illness. An attack of gout may last several days or—if left untreated—even weeks.

If you are at risk of developing gout, you should follow a program designed to prevent the buildup of uric acid in the blood. This may include losing weight and avoiding excess alcohol. Also, you might want to avoid certain foods that raise the level of uric acid, such as organ meats. Examples include liver, brain, kidney, or sweetbreads. If you follow the program carefully, you may be able to avoid problems—even if you have a strong family history of gout.

If you are experiencing any of the symptoms of gout, see your medical professional for a complete evaluation. He or she may ask you to take a blood uric acid test to help in diagnosing the condition. Evaluation will also include a review of any medicines that you've been taking, a check for any signs of kidney disease, and an examination of your blood pressure, skin, and joints. A sample of joint fluid may need to be tested. If the diagnosis is gout, your medical professional will prescribe medication and a plan of treatment tailored to your individual case.

There are two primary aspects to treating gout: Relieving the symptoms during an attack and preventing future attacks.

The earlier a gout attack is treated, the better the response. Nonprescription ibuprofen or naproxen can sometimes relieve early symptoms. If not, contact your medical professional immediately so that other medication can be prescribed. Don't try to treat a gout attack with aspirin; even very small doses of aspirin can make the condition worse.

After your gout attack has been controlled, medication can be prescribed that will help prevent recurrences. This is important because, without proper treatment, repeated attacks of gout can cause permanent joint damage. Gout may also cause uric acid to deposit in your kidneys and other organs—and that can cause permanent damage to the organs. Gout can be diagnosed and treated only by your medical professional, but you can help by following a treatment plan designed for you and by taking your medication faithfully.



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- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-332-7563. For TTY, call 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.

If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.