Arthritis AUSTRALIA

Fact Sheet

What about gout?

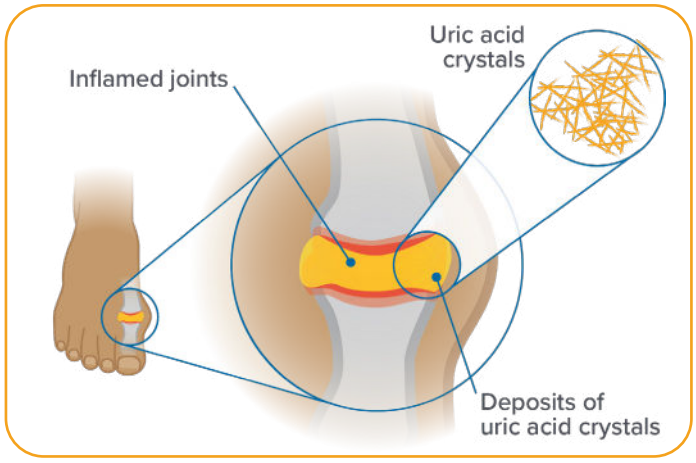
The main cause of gout is high uric acid levels. This is most often due to genetics. Gout is easily treated with medicines that lower uric acid.

What is gout?

Gout is a type of arthritis. It occurs when uric acid (urate) levels in the blood are unusually high. This can happen when:

- Our bodies make too much uric acid, or
- Our kidneys cannot get rid of the uric acid quickly enough

The excess uric acid moves into other areas of the body and forms tiny crystals, often inside small joints like the big toes, ankles, fingers or wrists. These crystals irritate the joint causing swelling and pain. This is called a gout flare (attack). Even after the flare settles, if crystals stay in the joint, there is always a risk of future flares.



Untreated gout can lead to:

- Permanent joint damage
- More flares (that happen more often and are more severe)
- Kidney disease and kidney stones
- Heart health problems.

Gout is a lifelong condition. It can be controlled with early diagnosis and a medicine you take everyday to lower your uric acid levels.

What causes gout?

If you are diagnosed with gout it is important to understand it is not your fault.

Gout is the result of having high uric acid levels, and the main reason this happens is because of genetics. Many people with gout have a family history of gout – it is a condition they inherited.

In some people, increased uric acid levels and risk of gout can also be caused by certain health conditions or medicines, such as:

- Kidney disease
- Being overweight or obese
- High cholesterol, high blood pressure or type 2 diabetes
- Taking some diuretic medicines (these help you produce more urine)

How do you know if you have gout?

A flare is usually the first sign of gout. Symptoms can happen very quickly, often overnight. Symptoms of a gout flare include:

- Joint pain, redness, heat and swelling that can be painful to touch
- Difficulty walking or moving the joint.

There are medicines to treat flares. Without treatment, a gout flare usually lasts about a week.

Uric acid can also build-up outside of the joints. This can cause small, solid, white, painless lumps to form under the skin, called tophi. Tophi are more likely to occur in people with frequent gout attacks.

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What can trigger a flare?

Triggers for a gout flare can include:

- **Alcohol** can increase uric acid levels and reduce the kidneys ability to remove it.
- Drinks high in **fructose**
- **Dehydration** (not drinking enough water)
- **Rapid weight loss** Gradual weight loss through exercise and healthy eating is the safest way to lose weight
- **Injury to the joint**

How is gout diagnosed?

To diagnose gout, your doctor may:

- Ask about your medical and family history
- Do a physical examination of your affected joint
- Take a blood test to check the level of uric acid in your blood.
- Check for uric acid crystals in your joint using a needle.

Your doctor will diagnose gout based on your symptoms and if you have uric acid crystals found in your joints.

What can I expect after a diagnosis?

1. **You are told you have gout.**
   You should be given a treatment plan to manage and prevent future flares.

My Gout Plan

2. **Understand your condition.**
   Learn about gout, its symptoms, triggers, and ways to manage it.



3. **Speak with your healthcare team.**
   Talk to your doctor about your treatment options, and any other health conditions you have. Some people may need to be referred to a rheumatologist, a doctor who treats arthritis.

4. **Start taking medicine to lower uric acid levels.**
   Gout is a lifelong condition that can be controlled with a medicine you take everyday.



5. **Review dose and treatment plan.**
   Your everyday medicine dose may change over time.

6. **Ongoing management.**
   Keep track of your symptoms, diet and any triggers you find. Take your medicine daily and see your health professional if your flares aren't improving with treatment.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Books: Arthritis Australia's *Taking control of your gout* booklet provides information and practical tips for managing gout. Available at www.arthritisaustralia.com.au or by calling **1800 011 041**.

Websites: *Staying Moving, Staying Strong* are information resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with arthritis, including gout. It is available at: arthritisaustralia.com.au/managing-arthritis/staying-moving-staying-strong/ For exercise tips and resources visit www.movingwitharthritis.org.au to help you self manage your arthritis through improved mobility.

Australian Rheumatology Association – information about medicines and seeing a rheumatologist (arthritis specialist) www.rheumatology.org.au.

Arthritis New Zealand www.arthritis.org.nz/gout-arthritis/

Quality Use of Medicines Alliance

Medcast · HealthCare Consumers · QUM connect · WISER HEALTHCARE · Arthritis Australia · Eczema Support Australia · Pharmaceutical Society of Australia · RACGP

Helping consumers and health professionals make safe and wise decisions about medicines and diagnostics.
Funded by the Australian Government through the Quality Use of Diagnostics, Therapeutics and Pathology Program.

INFOLINE: Contact your local arthritis office for information, education and support on **1800 011 041** or visit **www.arthritisaustralia.com.au**

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