

Gout

- Gout is a type of arthritis caused by too much uric acid in the bloodstream
- Excess uric acid settles in joints and causes pain and swelling
- Gout can be successfully managed with healthy lifestyle choices and medical treatment

Call our National Help Line on 1800 263 265

Gout is a common form of arthritis characterised by repeated attacks of extreme joint pain, swelling and redness.

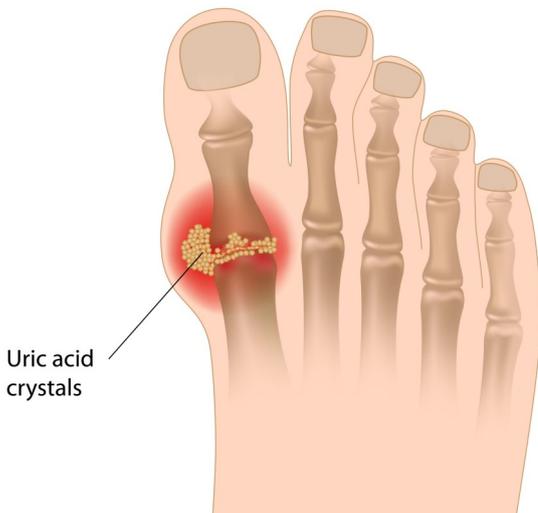
While most other types of arthritis develop slowly, an attack of gout happens suddenly, often overnight.

The most commonly affected joint is the big toe, but gout can affect your feet, ankles and knees, elbows, wrists and fingers.

Cause

Gout occurs when uric acid, a normal waste product, builds up in your bloodstream and forms crystals in a joint.

Your body makes uric acid when it breaks down purines, a substance found in your body and in some foods.



Uric acid normally dissolves in your blood, is processed by your kidneys and leaves your body in urine.

If your body makes too much uric acid, or your kidneys can't clear enough of it, it builds up in your blood. This is called hyperuricaemia.

Having hyperuricaemia doesn't mean you'll develop gout - in fact most people with hyperuricaemia don't go on to develop gout. Because of this it's thought that other factors such as your genes may be involved.

Other causes of gout can include the use of fluid tablets (diuretics), which can cause your body to retain too much uric acid.

Risk factors

You're more likely to have a gout attack if you:

- are male
- have a family history of gout
- have high levels of uric acid in your blood
- drink too much alcohol (especially beer)
- eat a diet high in purines such as meat, sweetbreads, offal, shellfish, and fructose
- are overweight
- use diuretics
- become dehydrated
- crash diet or fast.

Symptoms

- intense joint pain
- joint swelling
- skin over the joint may look red and shiny
- tophi (lumps of crystals that form under the skin) may occur in people who have repeated attacks.

Produced in partnership with:



Diagnosis

Gout is diagnosed using a number of tests including:

- medical history
- physical examination
- removing a sample of fluid from the joint. If you have gout, uric acid crystals can be seen under a microscope.

Treatment

The first step in treating your gout is getting the pain and inflammation of the attack under control. This may involve medication, cold packs on the swollen joint, and rest.

Once the painful attack is under control, your doctor may prescribe medications that lower the levels of uric acid in your blood. This will depend on things such as:

- how often you're having gout attacks
- if you've developed tophi or kidney stones
- other health conditions you may have (e.g. kidney disease).

Medications to reduce pain and inflammation

- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- colchicine
- corticosteroids injections or tablets.

Medications to lower levels of uric acid

- febuxostat
- allopurinol
- probenecid.

Self-management

During a gout attack, you can reduce pain and swelling by applying an ice pack to the painful joint for short periods of time, and protecting and resting the joint.

Other things you can do to prevent future attacks:

- maintain a healthy body weight. If you do need to lose weight, make sure your weight loss is gradual as crash diets can increase uric acid levels
- drink alcohol in moderation and avoid binge drinking
- drink plenty of water and stay hydrated
- talk with a dietitian to get advice on a healthy and well-balanced diet

- exercise regularly – aim to complete at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days of the week
- work closely with your doctor to prevent further attacks and actively manage your condition.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your rheumatologist
- Dietitian
- *MOVE muscle, bone & joint health*
National Help Line: 1800 263 265

Things to remember

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Information has been produced in consultation with and approved by: MOVE muscle, bone & joint health Ltd.

How we can help

Call our National Help Line and speak to our nurses
Phone 1800 263 265 or email helpline@move.org.au

Visit our website move.org.au for information on:

- muscle, bone and joint conditions
- ways to live well with a muscle, bone and joint condition
- our new resource *Managing your pain: An A-Z guide*
- programs and services
- peer support groups
- upcoming webinars, seminars and other events.

More to explore

- **Better Health Channel**
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

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