



Q. What is gout?

A. Gout is a common and painful form of inflammatory arthritis. It involves sudden and painful flares of extreme joint pain, swelling and redness. It most often affects the big toe, but any joint can be affected, including your wrists, ankles, knees, elbows, and fingers.

Gout is more common and develops earlier in men, often between 30 and 45 years. Women are more at risk of developing gout after menopause. It affects both men and women equally over 65.

The good news is gout can be effectively treated with medicine and self-care.

Q. What causes gout?

A. Gout occurs when uric acid builds up in your blood, causing crystals to form inside a joint.

Your body makes uric acid when it breaks down a substance called purine found in your body and the foods you eat. Uric acid then dissolves in your blood, is processed by your kidneys, and leaves your body in your urine.

Sometimes, however, your body makes too much uric acid, or your kidneys can't remove enough. It then accumulates in your blood. This is hyperuricaemia.

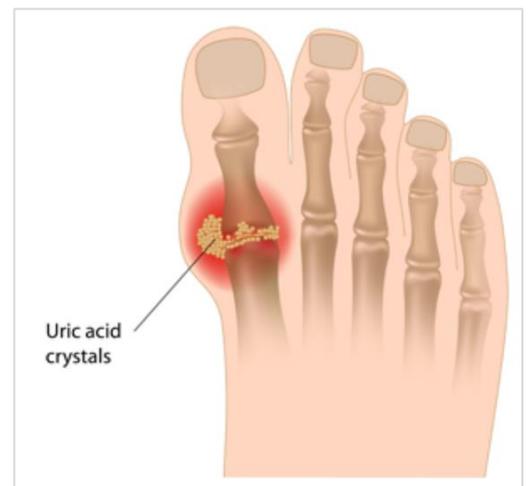
Having hyperuricaemia doesn't mean you'll automatically develop gout. About 2 in 3¹ people who have hyperuricemia don't go on to develop gout; however, it's not clear why.

A condition that causes similar painful attacks to joints is acute calcium pyrophosphate (CPP) crystal arthritis. CPP was once called 'pseudogout' or false gout because of these similarities. With CPP, the crystals are made from calcium, not uric acid.

Q. Are there things that can put you at risk of developing gout?

A. Yes. You're more likely to develop gout if you:

- are overweight or obese
- have conditions such as high blood pressure, chronic kidney disease, diabetes and heart disease
- drink too much alcohol (especially beer)
- eat a diet high in purines such as meat, sweetbreads, offal, shellfish, and fructose
- use diuretics
- become dehydrated
- crash diet, fast or overeat.



Q. What are the symptoms of gout?

A. The most common signs of gout are:

- a sudden flare of extreme joint pain in your big toe (though it can affect other joints), often happening during the night
- the joint is swollen, hot to the touch, and the skin over it may look red and shiny.

Q. How do I know if I have gout?

A. If you experience any of the signs of gout, you should see your doctor. The sooner gout is treated, the sooner you can manage the pain and inflammation of the current flare and prevent future ones.

Many conditions can cause joint pain and swelling, so your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and medical history, and examine the affected joint. If they suspect you have gout, they'll organise scans of the joint, usually an ultrasound or a CT (computerised tomography) scan. They may also remove a fluid sample from your joint. The fluid is examined under a microscope for the presence of uric acid crystals; this is the most conclusive test for gout.

Q. How is gout treated?

A. The first step is controlling the pain and inflammation. This may involve [medicines](#), cold packs, and resting the joint.

Your doctor will consider your medical history and other health issues when deciding which medicines are most appropriate and safe for you. They may also provide you with medicine to keep at home in case you have future flares. Treating flares as soon as possible lessens the time it takes to reduce your pain and reduces the severity and duration of a flare.

The most common medicine used to control pain and inflammation during a gout flare is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID). Another common medicine used to treat gout is colchicine. Corticosteroids (or steroids) can also be very effective.

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

- how often you have flares
- if you've developed tophi (hard, uric acid deposits under the skin) or kidney stones
- other health conditions you may have (e.g. kidney disease).

Q. What can I do to control my symptoms?

A. As well as taking your medicines as prescribed, you can reduce the pain and swelling of a flare by using an ice pack on the painful joint for short periods. You should also protect and rest the joint.

Other things you can do to prevent future flares:

- Take any medicines as prescribed.
- If you've been prescribed medicines to lower uric acid levels, be aware they can sometimes cause a gout flare when you first start taking them. But it's essential that you continue taking it. Talk with your doctor if you're concerned about this risk and what you can do to prevent it.
- Lose weight if you're overweight or obese. This must be done carefully and gradually, as crash diets or fasting can cause a flare. Your doctor and/or a dietitian can support you in this.
- Drink water regularly, as becoming dehydrated can increase your risk of a flare.
- Drink alcohol in moderation and avoid binge drinking.
- Eat a [healthy, balanced diet](#). Avoid or eat in moderation foods high in purines. Talk with a dietitian for more information.

- [Exercise](#) regularly.
- Work closely with your doctor to prevent further flares and actively manage your condition.

It's important to note that dietary changes alone aren't enough to address the underlying cause of gout – too much uric acid in your blood. For many years there's been a misconception that simply changing your diet will help keep your gout under control. However, research clearly shows that medicine is necessary for most people with gout to manage it effectively. If you decide to make some dietary changes, discuss this with your doctor and continue to take any medicine you've been prescribed to control your gout. And check out our article: '[Can gout attacks be managed through diet?](#)'.

Q. Where can I get more help?

A. Many people and support organisations can help you manage your gout. They include:

- your doctor
- your rheumatologist
- [dietitian](#)
- Musculoskeletal Australia | msk.org.au | National Arthritis and Back Pain+ Help Line: 1800 263 265

Q. How can Musculoskeletal Australia help?

A. Our nurses are available for you to speak with about gout, pain or any other musculoskeletal issues you have. You can contact them on weekdays between 9am-5pm. Phone 1800 263 265 or email helpline@msk.org.au. We also have a range of services – including free webinars – you can access on our [website](#).

More to explore

- [Gout](#)
American College of Rheumatology
- [Gout](#)
Arthritis Foundation
- [Gout](#)
MedlinePlus
- [Gout](#)
Versus Arthritis UK
- [Patient education: Gout \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)
Up-to-Date

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Reference

ⁱ Patient education: Gout (Beyond the Basics), Up-to-Date, Accessed 3 August 2022.

<https://www.uptodate.com/contents/gout-beyond-the-basics>

