

Gout Fast Facts for People with Heart Failure

What is gout?

Gout is one of the most painful forms of arthritis. Arthritis is a disease that causes painful swelling and stiffness of the joints. It occurs when too much uric acid builds up in the body. The buildup of uric acid can lead to:

- Sharp uric acid crystal deposits in joints, often in the big toe
- Deposits of uric acid (called tophi) that look like lumps under the skin
- Kidney stones from uric acid crystals in the kidneys.

What are the symptoms of a gout attack?

For many people, the first attack of gout occurs in the big toe. Often, the attack wakes a person from sleep. The toe is very sore, red, warm, and swollen. Gout can cause:

- Pain
- Swelling
- Redness
- Heat
- Stiffness in joints

In addition to the big toe, gout can affect the:

- Insteps (the top of the foot between the ankles and the toes)
- Ankles
- Heels
- Knees
- Wrists
- Fingers
- Elbows

A gout attack can be brought on by stressful events, alcohol or drugs, or another illness. For many people, the first attacks of gout usually get better within 3 to 10 days, even without treatment. The next attack may not occur for months or even years.

What causes gout?

Gout is caused by the buildup of too much uric acid in the body. Uric acid comes from the breakdown of substances called purines. Purines are found in all of your body's tissues. They are also in many foods, such as organ meats, anchovies, herring, asparagus and mushrooms.

Normally, uric acid dissolves in the blood. It passes through the kidneys and out of the body in urine. But uric acid can build up in the blood (hyperuricemia) when:

- The body increases the amount of uric acid it makes.
- The kidneys do not get rid of enough uric acid.
- A person eats too many foods high in purines.

What are the risk factors?

You are more likely to have gout if you:

- Have family members with the disease
- Are a man
- Are overweight
- Drink too much alcohol
- Eat too many foods rich in purines
- Have an enzyme defect that makes it hard for the body to break down purines
- Are exposed to lead in the environment
- Have had an organ transplant
- Use some medicines such as diuretics, aspirin, cyclosporine, or levodopa
- Take the vitamin niacin.

How is gout diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms, medical history, and family history of gout. Signs and symptoms of gout include:

- Hyperuricemia (high level of uric acid in the blood)
- Uric acid crystals in joint fluid
- More than one attack of acute arthritis (painful swelling and stiffness of the joints)
- Arthritis that develops in 1 day, producing a swollen, red, and warm joint
- Attack of arthritis in only one joint, usually the toe, ankle, or knee

To confirm a diagnosis of gout, your doctor may have you get a blood test or draw a sample of fluid from an inflamed (painful swelling) joint to look for crystals associated with gout.

How is gout treated?

Doctors usually use medicines to treat an acute attack of gout. Heart failure patients' medications can include:

- Corticosteroids, such as prednisone
- Colchicine, which works best when taken within the first 12 hours of an acute attack.

Your doctor may prescribe medications that block the production of uric acid such as allopurinol, in daily doses to prevent future attacks.

Avoid using over-the-counter or prescription anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) such as Motrin (ibuprofen) or Aleve (naproxen) for gout.

What can I do to stay healthy?

- Take the medicines your doctor prescribes as directed.
- Tell your doctor about all the medicines and vitamins you take.
- Plan follow up visits with your doctor.
- Maintain a healthy, balanced diet. Cut back on the amount of red meat and seafood you eat.
- Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy body weight. Ask your doctor about how to lose weight safely. Fast or extreme weight loss can increase uric acid levels in the blood.

Are alternative medicines safe for treating Gout?

Discuss alternative treatments with your doctor first. They can tell you if the treatments will interfere with your gout medications.

Since few of these treatments have been studied, it is unknown whether these treatments are helpful for gout pain.

Some alternative treatments that have been studied include:

- **Vitamin C.** Supplements containing vitamin C may reduce the levels of uric acid in your blood. Don't assume that if a little vitamin C is good for you, then lots is better. Big doses of vitamin C may increase your body's uric acid levels. Talk to your doctor about what a reasonable dose of vitamin C may be. And don't forget that you can increase your vitamin C intake by eating more fruits and vegetables, especially oranges.
- **Cherries.** Cherries have been associated with lower levels of uric acid in studies, but it isn't clear if they have any effect on gout signs and symptoms. Adding cherries and other dark-colored fruits, such as blackberries, blueberries, purple grapes and raspberries, to your diet may be a safe way to supplement your gout treatment, but discuss it with your doctor first.

Other complementary and alternative medicine treatments may help you cope until your gout pain subsides or your medications take effect. For instance, relaxation techniques, such as deep-breathing exercises and meditation, may help take your mind off your pain.

Where can I find more information on gout and other related conditions?

- Visit the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) Gout webpage: <https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/gout#tab-overview>

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Adapted from: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS). [Gout, Easy-to-Read Fast Facts.](#)

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