Gout: What You Need to Know

Gout is a condition that causes swelling, pain and redness in the joints. In this handout, you will learn about gout and what causes it. You will also learn common symptoms of gout and how to treat it.

WHAT IS GOUT?
Gout is a condition that causes swelling, pain and redness in the joints (the spaces between bones). Gout is a type of arthritis (a condition that causes stiffness or swelling of the joints).

Gout can affect common joints such as the big toe, ankle and knee. It usually affects 1 joint at a time.

WHAT CAUSES GOUT?
- Gout is caused by extra uric acid (a chemical made when your body breaks down food for energy) between the joints. Everyone makes uric acid, but some people who have Down syndrome make more than others.
- Uric acid is made from a substance called purines. Diets rich in purines will make your uric acid level higher.

WHAT CAUSES THE PAIN AND SWELLING?
- The pain and swelling are caused by a buildup of uric acid. Uric acid forms crystals that are sharp, pokey and painful.
- When there is too much purines in your diet, it can cause lots of uric acid to form. The extra uric acid causes painful crystals in your joints.

WHAT ARE COMMON SYMPTOMS OF GOUT?
- Swelling, pain, redness or stiffness in your joints.
- Together, these symptoms are called a gout attack. You usually have symptoms in the toes, ankles, knees, wrists or fingers.
- Very bad pain in your side or back.
- Gout can sometimes cause kidney stones (crystals made by waste building up in the kidneys).

HOW IS GOUT TREATED?
There are 4 main treatments for gout:
- Medications to prevent gout attacks
  These medications help keep uric acid levels low in the body.
  Example: Allopurinol
- Medications to treat swelling and pain
  These medications make gout attacks shorter and less painful.
  Examples: Prednisone, colchicine or NSAIDS (Motrin® or indomethacin)
- Weight loss
- Eat a healthy diet with foods that are low in purines. Foods that are low in purines include fruits, vegetables and foods with lots of fiber, like brown rice, lentils, beans and whole wheat bread and cherries.

Did you know?
There are certain foods that are high in purines and can make gout worse. This includes, red meat, sugar, and certain seafood, like scallops, mussels, haddock, tuna and sardines and alcohol. Eat less of these foods to help prevent gout attacks.