

You Ask, They Answer

Q: What's gout and why is it considered a disease common in "old and rich men"?

A: The reasons are that the incidence of gout is higher in males compared to females and rises with age. Males tend to have higher uric acid levels compared to females. In older people, there may be more diuretic use for hypertension or congestive cardiac failure, renal insufficiency leading to less excretion of uric acid, greater use of low dose aspirin which reduces uric acid excretion, and alcohol (ethanol) abuse. These can contribute to the development of hyperuricemia and gout in the elderly.

Back in those days (no longer the case now), gout stemmed from food that only the rich could afford, e.g., red meat, seafood, alcohol, which explains why it was considered a disease of "old and rich men".

Q: What are the telltale signs of the condition that warrant a medical check-up?



A: 1. **Intense joint pain** – gout usually affects the big toe, but other common joints affected include ankles, knees, elbows, wrists, and fingers

2. **Lingering discomfort** – even after the severe attacks subside

3. **Swollen, tender warm and red joints**

4. **Joint stiffness**

Q: Should all the tell tale signs you mentioned be present for people to see a doctor and for how long should these symptoms be present to sound alarm bells? Should patients see an orthopaedic specialist or a rheumatologist?

A: They need not all be there. They all warrant medical attention when it occurs. They can either see a GP, orthopaedic surgeon, or rheumatologist. All can manage gout.

Q: What are the medications and lifestyle changes that can treat gout?

A: Diet is the first line, followed by medications such as NSAIDs and Colchicine for acute flare ups. Allopurinol is used to lower uric acid levels to prevent further attacks, while intra-articular steroid injections can treat severe pain. In general, medications are pretty effective if patients are compliant.

Q: Are there any prevention measures for gout?

A: Avoid foods that can trigger a gout flare-up. Foods high in an organic compound called purines (containing more than 150 – 200mg of purines per 100 grams) may raise your uric acid levels. These include organ meats like liver, kidney, and brain; red meat and game meat such as veal and venison; seafood like scallops, crab, shrimp, and roe; and sugary drinks like fruit juice and carbonated drinks. When purines get digested, uric acid is produced as a byproduct, which can lead to gout.

Also, limit or avoid alcohol and drink plenty of water while maintaining a healthy body weight. And avoid medications that can trigger an acute flare, e.g., diuretics. As mentioned, you can also take uric acid lowering drugs like allopurinol.

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