

GOUT FACT SHEET

- A gout “flare” (attack) usually strikes suddenly, at night, in one location (usually the large joint in the big toe). During the attack, the joint becomes hot, red, swollen, and extremely tender.
- The pain of a gout flare can be excruciating—it has been compared to childbirth or bone fractures—and is worst in the first 24 hours.
- Gout symptoms can be triggered by stress, alcohol, certain medicines, or the presence of another illness.
- Even without treatment, the symptoms usually go away within 3 to 10 days, and the next attack may not occur for months or even years, if at all. However, over time attacks can be more severe, last longer, and occur more often.
- The primary risk factor for gout is a high level of uric acid in the blood—a condition called hyperuricemia. Uric acid is a natural product of the body’s metabolism. But if too much uric acid is produced, or if the kidneys don’t eliminate enough of it, it can deposit needle-like crystals in the joints and other tissues.
- The pain of gout attacks is caused when these uric acid crystals are deposited in the fluid that cushions the joint (the synovial fluid) or in the space between two bones, producing irritation and causing the body to respond with painful inflammation.
- Gout attacks are more likely to reoccur when uric acid levels are elevated. In fact, the higher the level, the more likely an attack is to occur. Measurement of uric acid levels can be determined through a simple blood test. Ask your healthcare provider.
- Although it’s true that certain foods and alcoholic beverages contribute to the body’s pool of uric acid, these are two among many factors related to hyperuricemia.
- Over time, gout can progress and cause damage to joints, potentially leading to disability. However, with proper treatment, most people with gout are able to control their symptoms.