

Medicines for Gout

This information sheet will help you understand more about the medicines used to treat gout. This information sheet is not a substitute for talking with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What is gout?

Gout is a common form of joint inflammation (swelling and redness). Gout causes sudden attacks of severe pain, usually in a single joint. The joint becomes red, swollen and very sore to touch.

Gout is caused by high levels of a chemical called uric acid in the blood. Your body makes uric acid when it breaks down purines, which are found naturally in your body and in some foods. If you have too much uric acid or if your kidneys don't remove enough of it from your body, you can have a gout attack.



How is gout treated?

Gout is managed in two steps. The first step is to treat the gout attack. This involves:

- protecting the affected joint so that it does not get knocked, as this would be very painful
- resting and elevating the affected joint, and applying ice packs to the area to reduce swelling
- taking a medicine for the pain and swelling (see Table 1).

The second step is to prevent further gout attacks. This could include:

- exercising regularly, and losing weight, if you need to
- avoiding food and drinks high in purines such as red meat, shellfish, beer, and offal (liver, kidneys)
- drinking water, not sugary drinks, to help your kidneys remove uric acid.

Medicines to treat gout attacks

Table 1: Medicines used to treat the pain and swelling caused by a gout attack

Medicine and how it works	Stop the medicine and seek urgent medical attention if you experience any of these symptoms
Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, diclofenac and naproxen NSAIDs reduce inflammation (swelling and redness). Always take NSAIDs with water and food. Take for the shortest time needed to treat your inflammation.	indigestion, stomach pain, passing black tarry bowel motions, rash, mouth ulcers, swollen lips, difficulty breathing, chest pain, weakness or slurred speech
Corticosteroids ('steroids') Can be taken as a tablet (eg, prednisone) or given as an injection into the affected joint. These medicines work by reducing inflammation (swelling and redness).	indigestion, stomach pain, passing black tarry bowel motions, infections, mood changes, sleep problems, weight gain
Colchicine Reduces inflammation (swelling and redness). Used as an alternative to NSAIDs or corticosteroids in people who are unable to take these medicines. Colchicine can cause serious side effects if not taken correctly. Talk to your health care professional about how to take colchicine.	nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, blood in the bowel motions, black tarry bowel motions, blood in the urine, rash

Medicines to prevent gout attacks

Some people who experience frequent gout attacks (two or more attacks in one year) or more severe gout may need to take a medicine to lower the uric acid level in their blood.

Table 2 describes the common uric acid lowering medicines. These medicines need to be taken every day to prevent further gout attacks.

Table 2: Medicines used to prevent further gout attacks

Medicine and how it works	Stop the medicine and seek urgent medical attention if you experience any of these symptoms
Allopurinol Reduces the amount of uric acid your body makes.	rash, itching, exfoliation (skin flaking off), fever, aching joints, mouth ulcers, swollen lips, difficulty breathing, kidney stones (severe pain in your back or side), blood in the urine
Febuxostat Reduces the amount of uric acid your body makes.	diarrhoea, nausea, headache, rash, mouth ulcers, swollen lips, difficulty breathing
Probenecid Increases the amount of uric acid removed by your kidneys.	rash, itching, fever, mouth ulcers, swollen lips, difficulty breathing, kidney stones (severe pain in your back or side), blood in the urine

General advice about gout medicines

Gout medicines, like any medicine, can be harmful if not taken correctly.

- Always store your medicines out of sight and reach of children. Store medicines in a locked cupboard or somewhere that your child cannot reach or access.
- If children live with you or visit your house, ask your pharmacist to put a child safety cap on your medicine bottle. Make sure the cap is relocked after each use. Remember these caps are not child-proof and children may still be able to open the container, so make sure you store the medicine out of sight and reach of children.
- If you no longer require a medicine or if it has expired, return the medicine to your local pharmacy for appropriate disposal.
- Never share your medicines with others.

Where can I find out more?

Talk to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Read the Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) for your medicine, available at:

www.medsafe.govt.nz/Medicines/infoSearch.asp

Visit the Ministry of Health website on gout:

www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/gout

Visit the Health Navigator website for more information on

gout medicines:

www.healthnavigator.org.nz/medicines/g/gout-medications/

colchicine:

www.healthnavigator.org.nz/medicines/c/