

Medicines for Gout

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

What is gout?

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

The big toe is most commonly affected. Gout attacks usually last 7–10 days if not treated. Long-standing gout can cause lumps (called tophi) to form around the joints and can cause permanent damage that may affect your movement.

What causes gout?

Gout is caused by high levels of a chemical called uric acid in the blood. Your body makes uric acid from chemicals called purines, which are found in food. Foods containing a lot of purines include red meat, offal (liver, kidneys), shellfish, oily fish (sardines, mackerel), yeast extracts and beer.

Your kidneys get rid of uric acid. If you have too much uric acid or if your kidneys don't remove enough, you can have a gout attack.

What increases my risk of gout?

The amount of uric acid in the blood is affected by:

- genes
- diet – eating foods that contain a lot of purines (see 'What causes gout?')
- kidney problems
- obesity
- type 2 diabetes
- heart disease.

Some medicines may cause gout. These include:

- diuretics (also known as 'water tablets') used to treat high blood pressure and fluid retention
- some medicines used to treat high blood pressure
- aspirin used to prevent heart attacks and stroke
- some cancer medicines.

Talk to your doctor if you are concerned that a medicine you are taking may cause gout.

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
- using ice packs to reduce the swelling
- taking a medicine for the pain and swelling.

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

- losing weight, if you need to
- exercising regularly
- avoiding food and drinks that are high in purines (see 'What causes gout?')
- avoiding sugary soft drinks and fruit juices and drinking water instead, to help your kidneys to remove uric acid
- taking a medicine to prevent further gout attacks, if needed.

Your doctor can monitor your uric acid level by doing a blood test. The goal is to keep your uric acid level below 0.36 millimoles per litre (mmol/L). This will help to prevent gout attacks.

Medicines to treat gout attacks

Three types of medicine are used to treat the pain and swelling caused by a gout attack.

- **Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)** such as diclofenac, ibuprofen and naproxen. NSAIDs can cause stomach ulcers, so your doctor may also prescribe a medicine called a proton pump inhibitor (PPI) to protect the stomach.
- **Corticosteroids** reduce inflammation (swelling and redness). They can be given as tablets (eg, prednisone) or as an injection into the affected joint.
- **Colchicine** may be used by people who are unable to take NSAIDs or corticosteroids.

Table 1 shows some important side effects of these medicines.

Make sure you know how much medicine to take by talking to your doctor or pharmacist. Taking too much may be harmful.

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.

Some uric acid lowering medicines are listed below.

- **Allopurinol** reduces the amount of uric acid your body makes.
- **Probenecid** increases the amount of uric acid removed by your kidneys.
- **Febuxostat** reduces the amount of uric acid your body makes.

Uric acid lowering medicines are usually started at least two weeks after an attack has settled. These medicines need to be taken every day.

Table 2 shows some of the side effects of the medicines used to prevent gout attacks.

If you develop a rash while taking any of these medicines, stop taking them and tell your doctor immediately.

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/consumers/cmi/cmiform.asp

Visit the Ministry of Health webpage on gout:

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

Read the PHARMAC patient information leaflet on gout, available at:

www.pharmac.govt.nz/medicines/your-health/gout/

Table 1: Medicines used to treat gout attacks

Medicine	Important side effects: Stop the medicine and seek urgent medical attention if you experience any of these side effects.
NSAIDs	indigestion, stomach pain, passing black tarry bowel motions, rash, mouth ulcers, swollen lips, difficulty breathing
Corticosteroids	indigestion, stomach pain, passing black tarry bowel motions, infections, mood changes, sleep problems, weight gain
Colchicine	nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain, blood in the urine

Table 2: Medicines used to prevent further gout attacks

Medicine	Important side effects: Stop the medicine and seek urgent medical attention if you experience any of these side effects.
Allopurinol	rash, mouth ulcers, swollen lips, difficulty breathing, kidney stones (severe pain in your back or side), blood in the urine
Probenecid	rash, mouth ulcers, swollen lips, difficulty breathing, kidney stones (severe pain in your back or side), blood in the urine
Febuxostat	diarrhoea, nausea, headache, rash, mouth ulcers, swollen lips, difficulty breathing