



Gout diet

By Mayo Clinic staff

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Definition

Gout, a painful form of arthritis, has long been associated with diet, particularly overindulgence in meat, seafood and alcohol. As a result, gout treatment used to include severe dietary restrictions, which made the gout diet hard to stick to. Fortunately, newer medications to treat gout have reduced the need for a strict gout diet.

In many ways, the gout diet resembles the healthy eating plan recommended for most people. Besides helping you maintain a healthy weight and avoid several chronic diseases, this diet may contribute to better overall management of your gout.

Gout occurs when high levels of uric acid in your blood cause crystals to form and accumulate around a joint. Your body produces uric acid when it breaks down purines. Purines occur naturally in your body, but you also get them from eating certain foods, such as organ meats, anchovies, herring, asparagus and mushrooms.

Purpose

A gout diet helps to control the production and elimination of uric acid, which may help prevent gout attacks or reduce their severity. The diet isn't a treatment for gout, but may help you control your attacks. Obesity also is a risk factor for gout, so losing weight can help you lower your risk of attacks.

Diet details

A gout diet reduces your intake of foods that are high in purines, which helps control your body's production of uric acid. If you're overweight or obese, lose weight. However, avoid fasting and rapid weight loss because these can promote a gout attack. Drink plenty of fluids to help flush uric acid from your body. Also avoid high-protein diets, which can cause you to produce too much uric acid (hyperuricemia).

To follow the diet:

- **Limit animal protein.** Avoid or severely limit high-purine foods, including organ meats, such as liver, and herring, anchovies and mackerel. Red meat (beef, pork and lamb), fatty fish and seafood (tuna, shrimp, lobster and scallops) are associated with increased risk of gout. Because all animal protein contains purines, limit your intake to 4 to 6 ounces (113 to 170 grams) daily.
- **Eat more plant-based proteins.** You can increase your protein by including more plant-based sources, such as beans and legumes. This switch will also help you cut down on saturated fats, which may indirectly contribute to obesity and gout.
- **Limit or avoid alcohol.** Alcohol interferes with the elimination of uric acid from your body. Drinking beer, in particular, has been linked to gout attacks. If you're having an attack, avoid alcohol. However, when you're not having an attack, drinking one or two 5-ounce (148 milliliter) servings a day of wine is not likely to increase your risk.
- **Drink plenty of fluids, particularly water.** Fluids can help remove uric acid from your body. Aim for eight to 16 8-ounce (237 milliliter) glasses a day.
- **Choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products.** Some studies have shown that drinking skim or low-fat milk and eating foods made with them, such as yogurt, help reduce the risk of gout. Aim for adequate dairy intake of 16 to 24 fluid ounces (473 to 710 milliliters) daily.
- **Choose complex carbohydrates.** Eat more whole grains and fruits and vegetables and fewer refined carbohydrates, such as white bread, cakes and candy.
- **Limit or avoid sugar.** Too many sweets can leave you with no room for plant-based proteins and low-fat or fat-free dairy products — the foods you need to avoid gout. Sugary foods also tend to be high in calories, so they make it easier to eat more than you're likely to burn off. Although there's debate about whether sugar has a direct effect on uric acid levels, sweets are definitely linked to overweight and obesity.

There's also some evidence that drinking four to six cups of coffee a day lowers gout risk in men.

Results

Following a gout diet can help you limit your body's uric acid production and increase its elimination. It's not likely to lower the uric acid concentration in your blood enough to treat your gout without medication, but it may help decrease the number of attacks and limit their severity. Following the gout diet and limiting your calories — particularly if you also add in moderate daily exercise, such as brisk walking — also can improve your overall health by helping you achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Risks

The risks of following the diet indefinitely are few, if any.

References

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