Gout

Gout is a type of arthritis that happens when uric acid crystals build up in a joint. This can cause sudden, severe pain called a gout flare. The joint may swell, turn red, or feel hot.

More than half of gout flares start in the big toe. Gout can also affect the knees, hands, and feet. Uric acid crystals may build up in other parts of the body too, such as the kidneys, where they can cause kidney stones. Over time, these crystals can keep building up and form lumps under the skin. They are usually not painful, but they can limit joint movement and damage bone or cartilage.

See a podiatrist if you think you have had a gout flare or notice hard lumps under the skin. They can diagnose gout by:

- Checking the joint
- Ordering a blood test
- Testing fluid from the joint

Causes
Everyone has some uric acid in their body, but problems start when the level gets too high. Extra uric acid can form crystals and raise the risk of gout.

Uric acid usually dissolves in the blood. It then passes through the kidneys and leaves the body in urine.

About two thirds of uric acid comes from the body itself. The rest comes from food. Many foods contain purines, which the body changes into uric acid. Follow your doctor's advice about checking uric acid levels.

Risks
Your risk of gout is higher if you:

- Have a family history of gout
- Have high blood pressure, diabetes, or kidney disease
- Take certain medicines

Symptoms
Gouts often start suddenly. Symptoms can include:

- Severe joint pain
- Swelling
- Extreme tenderness, even with light touch
- Trouble putting weight on the joint

Pain often lasts for a few days.

Treatment
Gout is treatable but not curable. Treatment plans differ for each person. Goals include lowering uric acid levels and easing joint pain. Lower uric acid levels can:

- Reduce how often flares happen
- Make flares less severe
- Lower the risk of kidney stones and tophi

Tracking Flare-ups
Get care right away if gout symptoms start. Your doctor may want you to track flares. The American Kidney Foundation has a uric acid and gout flare tracker that may help.

Medicine
Your podiatrist may prescribe medicines to help with pain. If symptoms continue even with oral medicine, some people may need medicine given through an IV to lower uric acid.

If you are prescribed gout medicine, take it as directed. Even if pain goes away, keep taking this medicine to help prevent long-term problems.

Lifestyle Changes

Your podiatrist may also suggest lifestyle changes, such as:

- Losing weight
- Drinking less alcohol
- Changing your diet

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8495.