



## HEALTH INFORMATION

# Gout

## What is Gout?

**Gout is a condition which causes pain, inflammation in one or more joints. It is a type of arthritis (although it is very different to the more common rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis). The pain of a gout attack can be severe.**

## What causes it?

Gout is caused by a chemical in the blood called uric acid . Uric acid is usually harmless, and is made in the body. Most is passed out with the urine, and some from the gut with the faeces (stools).

When suffering from gout the amount of uric acid in the blood builds up. From time to time the level may become too high and tiny grit-like crystals of uric acid may form. The crystals typically collect in a joint. The crystals irritate the tissues in the joint to cause inflammation, swelling, and pain - a gout attack.

## What are the Symptoms and signs?

Gout usually occurs in attacks. An attack typically develops quickly over a few hours. It usually causes severe pain in one joint. The base of the big toe is the most commonly affected joint. Walking can be very painful and even the weight of bedclothes can hurt.

Any joint can be affected. Sometimes two or more joints are affected. Affected joints usually swell, and the skin may

look red and inflamed. A gout attack may last several days, but usually goes completely within 7-10 days. Less severe attacks can occur which may be mistaken at first for other forms of arthritis. Weeks, months or even years may go by between attacks.

## What is the treatment?

**There are two main goals in treating gout:**

- Relieving symptoms during an attack of gout: using the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) types of painkillers; in some cases alternative medications may also be required.
- Preventing future gout attacks: through a combination of lifestyle changes (such as losing weight if you are overweight) and taking a medication called allopurinol to lower levels of uric acid.

When medication is taken as directed with recommended lifestyle changes, such as changing your diet and drinking less alcohol, many people reduce their uric acid levels sufficiently over time and dissolve the crystals that cause gout.

