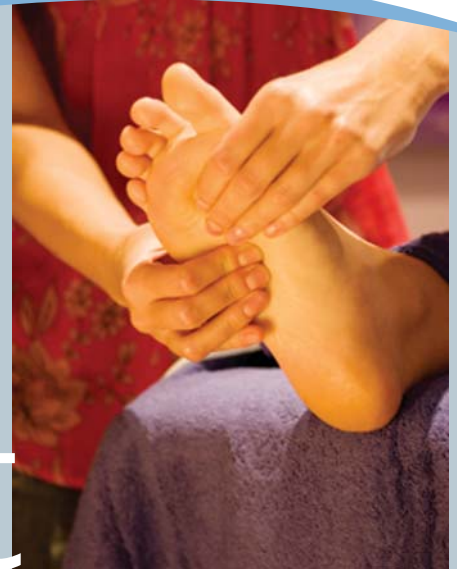




Dr Anita Lim, Consultant Rheumatologist, Department of Medicine, shares some insights on Gout.

# What You Need To Know About Gout



### Q) What is Gout?

Gout is a type of arthritis (joint inflammation). It is the most common inflammatory arthritis in men, affecting 1-2 % of adult men in Western countries. In Singapore, the majority of gout patients seen in the hospital setting are middle-aged men who have an attack of gout brought on by an underlying illness and half of these patients drink alcohol regularly.

### Q) What causes Gout?

In gout, the inflammation happens because tiny crystals of a substance called uric acid collect within a joint. They are more likely to form if there is a high level of uric acid in the body. Uric acid is a waste product formed by the body's natural breakdown of purines (chemicals found in the cells of the body).

### Q) What are the signs and symptoms of Gout?

The first stage is usually without any symptoms except for the high blood serum uric acid levels. The first symptom is most often an acute painful, swollen red big toe. However, other frequently involved joints include the ankle, foot, knee, wrist, elbow and the small joints of the hand. The uric acid crystals cause inflammatory arthritis, which in turn leads to intermittent swelling, redness, heat, pain, and stiffness in these joints. Some 70-80% of individuals will have repeated attacks within 2 years. If left untreated, in the later stages, acute attacks often involve multiple joints resulting in joint damage, loss of mobility, chronic pain and formation of tophi (urate deposits in soft tissue such as overlying joints and tendons).

### Q) Who is likely to develop Gout?

Men are more likely to develop gout than women who tend to develop it after menopause. Other risk factors include obesity, family history, kidney disease, high blood pressure, the metabolic syndrome, high alcohol consumption and the use of certain medications (low dose aspirin, diuretics).

### Q) How is it diagnosed?

Gout is usually diagnosed clinically by removing some fluid from a joint and finding the typical needle-shaped uric acid crystals under a microscope. In an acute attack, the blood level of uric acid may be normal and therefore cannot be used to exclude the diagnosis in an acute attack. However, uric acid levels are useful to monitor the effectiveness of treatments that lower blood urate.

### Q) What are the treatment options?

Once the diagnosis is confirmed, medicines will be prescribed to be taken during the attack. For most people, the best medicine for an acute attack is a "non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug" (NSAID). An alternative to NSAIDS is colchicine which can be taken 2 to 3 times a day. Sometimes, steroids are used to treat gout. If the attacks are frequent or get worse, please seek further medical help.

### Q) Are there lifestyle changes to reduce the risk of gout?

Yes! If you are overweight, losing weight through healthy eating and regular physical activity is important. Research shows that losing weight may lower your level of uric acid and reduce occurrence of gout attacks. If you drink a lot of alcohol, you should consider cutting down or stopping altogether. Drinking a lot of beer or spirits increases the chance of getting gout. However, wine doesn't have the same effect. You should try to drink at least 2 to 3 litres of water a day as it helps to remove uric acid from the body. Eating food high in purines (such as anchovies, sardines, goose, lentils, roe, etc) is also known to increase uric acid levels. People that eat the most seafood and meat (especially organ meats such as liver, kidneys, brain, heart) also seem to be the most likely to get gout.

For enquiries or appointments on Gout, please contact:



| Clinic                                  | Contact Details                | Our Doctors (specialising in Gout)   |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Clinic D<br>Main Building 1,<br>Level 1 | Appointment Line:<br>6772 2002 | Senior Consultants:<br>Dr Boey Mee Leng<br>A/Prof Koh Dow Rhoon<br><br>Consultants:<br>Dr Sheila Vasoo<br>Dr Cheng Yew Kwang<br>Dr Anita Lim<br><br>Associate Consultant:<br>Dr Anselm Mak |

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