

Diet for Gout Sufferers

Gout - a form of arthritis that involves sudden, severe attacks of pain, redness and tenderness in joints - occurs when high levels of uric acid in the blood (hyperuricemia) cause the acid to build up and be deposited in the toe and other joints. Uric acid is a waste product formed when purines, a substance found naturally in the body and in certain foods, breaks down.

Keeping uric acid levels within a normal range is the key to preventing gout. In the past, this meant rigid dietary restrictions. Since the development of medications such as allopurinol that help keep uric acid levels in check, however, these dietary restrictions are not as stringent as they once were. Still, eating a diet low in purines may help reduce the frequency and severity of gout attacks.

Foods that have high levels of purines include: anchovies, game meats (such as venison and duck), gravies, herring, organ meats (liver, brain, kidney and sweetbreads), sardines and scallops. To keep your uric acid levels lower, try to avoid these foods. In addition, most experts advise eating no more than six ounces of lean meat, poultry or fish a day for nearly everyone, especially people who have gout, because these high-protein foods increase the blood level of uric acid.

For a more detailed list of foods high in purines that you may want to limit or avoid, talk with your physician or a dietitian. They can guide you on how to best meet your nutritional needs while reducing your risk of gout.

Other lifestyle modifications that can help prevent gout include avoiding or limiting alcohol consumption, maintaining a healthy weight, losing weight if you're overweight and drinking plenty of fluids. Each of these measures can help lower your blood level of uric acid, which in turn may decrease the number of painful gout attacks you experience.

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