

Gout – its no laughing matter!

As far back as the 5th century BC Hippocrates attributed gout to excessive intake of food and wine and recommended strict dietary restriction and reduction of alcoholic beverages. However, despite the use of powerful anti-inflammatory drugs and medication designed to increase the excretion of uric acid from the body the foundation of a holistic approach is still very similar to that recommended by Hippocrates all those years ago.

Gout is perhaps the oldest known and documented type of arthritis. Gout or gouty arthritis has been described since Hippocrates in the 5th century B.C. At one time, the term “gout” was used to describe all types of arthritis. Known as the “Disease of Kings” due to its association with rich foods and alcohol consumption, colourful depictions of gout can be found in art and literature often with commentary on the moral character of the gout sufferer!



The idea that gout was caused by a life based in wine women and song often made it the but of jokes with amusing picture of overindulgent men resting up their bandaged throbbing foot jumping to mind. However, anyone who has suffered at the hands of gout will find it anything but a funny problem!

The frequency of gout rom the 17th century on has been attributed to the high intake, by the rich, of meat, including offal. The poor were not at much risk of gout, illustrating the influence of culture on disease. It is interesting that gout is again on the increase and it is again probably caused by another cultural influence – the almost fanatical adoption of the ultra low carbohydrate diet made famous by the late Dr Atkins. More than twice as many people suffer from gout now compared to ten years ago and the ultra low carbohydrate diet fad may be a big factor in this apparent increase due to the fact that a great increase in dietary protein has replaced the carbohydrate. However, the weight comes off the levels of dietary DNA increases. All meats and some vegetables contain DNA that in turn serves as a ready supply of chemicals known as purines. As the body brakes these substances down the end product is uric acid – the main culprit in gout. In fact the term gout is derived from Gutta which means a "drop", perhaps because the severe inflammation caused by uric acid crystals forming within the joint was like a fiery liquid dropping on the foot. As the uric acid is formed the kidneys normally filter it away but if levels become very high the kidney often can't cope and



the excess crystallises out with in the joint spaces causing the characteristic acute inflammation and pain of gout.

In general, gout is the result of either increased production of uric acid or a reduced ability to get rid of it or both over production and under excretion of uric acid. Several dietary factors are known to trigger gout, including consumption of high-purine content foods (such as organ meats, meat, yeast, poultry), fats, excessive alcohol, and refined carbohydrates. Obesity is also associated with an increased rate of gout. Weight reduction in obese individuals significantly reduces uric acid levels. Hydration is also important as a liberal fluid intake keeps the urine diluted and promotes the excretion of uric acid.

The naturopathic approach to gout

The naturopathic approach to gout involves the following the eight point plan outlined below;

1. Low-purine diet
2. Elimination of alcohol intake
3. Achievement of ideal body weight
4. Elimination of refined carbohydrates
5. Low-fat intake
6. Avoid high-protein, high-fat foods
7. Liberal fluid intake
8. Liberal consumption of cherries or flavonoid-rich extracts

A **low-purine diet** has long been the mainstay of dietary therapy for gout. Foods with high purine levels should be entirely omitted. These include: organ meats, yeast (brewer's and baker's), herring, sardines, mackerel, and anchovies. Intake of foods with moderate levels of protein should be reduced to 1 serving every 2-3 days as well. These include: dried legumes, spinach, asparagus, fish, poultry, and mushrooms. Low-purine foods may be eaten in small amounts daily.

Alcohol increases uric acid production by accelerating purine breakdown. It also reduces uric acid excretion by increasing lactate production, which impairs kidney function. Elimination of alcohol is all that is needed to reduce uric acid levels and prevent gouty arthritis in many individuals.

Obesity is associated with an increased rate of gout. Weight reduction in obese individuals significantly reduces serum uric acid levels. Weight reduction should involve the use of a high-fiber, low-fat diet, as this type of diet will help manage the elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels that are also common in obesity.

Refined carbohydrates and **saturated fat** intake should be kept to a minimum. Simple

sugars, such as refined sugar, honey, maple syrup, corn syrup, and fructose, increase uric acid production, while saturated fats decrease uric acid excretion. The diet should focus on complex carbohydrates, such as legumes, whole grains, and vegetables rather than on simple sugars.

High-protein and **high-protein** foods are usually foods that are high in purines. High-fat animal foods also promote inflammation and should be avoided, regardless of purine content. High protein foods that are not high in purines should be eaten only in small amounts to avoid taxing the kidneys, which are burdened with excreting excess uric acid.

Liberal fluid intake keeps the urine diluted and promotes the excretion of uric acid. Furthermore, dilution of the urine reduces the risk of kidney stones. Drink at least 1.5 litres of pure water each day.

The most popular natural approach to gout has been consuming the equivalent of one-half pound of fresh *cherries* per day. This may not be very convenient, using Cherry fruit extract capsules solves this problem and ensures a regular intake of the key ingredients. In general 1000mg of cherry fruit extract taken 2-3 times a day is recommended. This approach can help in lowering uric acid levels and preventing attacks of gout. The flavonoid compounds in cherries have been shown to block the production of uric acid as well as prevent destruction of joint structures. Flavonoid rich extracts like grape seed extract or pine bark extract may be effective substitutes for cherries. To ease the pain of gout the use of Devils claw (*harpagophytum*) or knotgrass extract may prove helpful.

Finally, all those with gout should work hard to modify their lifestyle including limiting alcohol intake, encouraging weight loss where appropriate and decreasing food rich in purines. Other medical conditions should also be attended to and controlled including hypertension, diabetes and hyperlipidemia (high blood fats). If you are prone to gout it's worth getting a general check up to exclude other underlying problems, such as those previously mentioned, that may be an aggravating or maintaining factor.

***** BOX OUT *****

The following foods have **very high** purine levels, and should be avoided completely;

- Anchovies
- Bouillon
- Brains
- Broth
- Consommé
- Dried legumes
- Goose
- Gravy
- Heart

- Herring
- Kidneys
- Liver
- Mackerel
- Meat extracts
- Mincement
- Mussels
- Partridge
- Roe
- Sardines
- Scallops
- Shrimp
- Sweetbreads
- Yeast (baker's and brewer's)
- Yeast extracts (e.g., Marmite, Vegemite)

These foods have **moderately** high purine levels;

- Asparagus
- Cauliflower
- Legumes
- Lentils
- Mushrooms
- Oatmeal
- Peas (dried)
- Soy
- Spinach
- Tripe

These foods are very **low** in purines and can be consumed freely;

- Butter
- Cereals and cereal products
- Cheese (young or non matured)
- Corn
- Cornbread
- Eggs
- Fruit juices (Sub acid)
- Fruits (Sub acid)
- Gelatine
- Ice cream
- Milk
- Noodles
- Nuts
- Refined wheat flour
- Tapioca
- Vegetables (except those noted above)
- White bread and crackers (but not whole wheat, which is moderately high in purines)
- White rice

***** BOX OUT ENDS *****