



**tip** Protect yourself from gout

Anyone who's had a gout attack knows that even the first one was one too many. To lower your risk of having another one:

- Avoid alcohol and foods rich in purines (see the diet section in the main article).
- Ask your doctor if you weigh too much. Lose a few pounds if you need to.
- Drink plenty of water. Doing so helps your body eliminate uric acid.

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**Men's health**

Current Article

**Gout: A real pain in the...toe**

Gout — a form of arthritis — strikes suddenly, usually at night. Its signature symptom is severe joint pain, most often in a big toe. Knees, heels, wrists, fingers and elbows also can be affected. Without treatment, a gout attack can last for days or even weeks.



The pain is part of the body's reaction to needle-like crystals in joints. These crystals form when uric acid builds up in the blood. Uric acid typically forms when substances called purines — often found in high-protein foods — are broken down in the body.

Normally, any extra uric acid in your body is passed through your kidneys into your urine. But, if your body produces too much uric acid or doesn't excrete enough, crystals of uric acid accumulate in your joints, triggering gout.

**Are you at risk?**

A number of factors can make it more likely that you'll develop gout:

- **Sex and age.** Gout is more common in men than women. It's rare in children and young adults.
- **Genetics.** One out of every five people with gout has a family history of the disease.
- **Diet.** Eating too many foods rich in purines — such as liver, game meats, anchovies, mushrooms, asparagus and dried beans — can bring on gout. So can drinking too much alcohol, which interferes with the body's ability to get rid of uric acid.
- **Weight.** People who are overweight generally produce more uric acid than people who are at a healthy weight.
- **Other health conditions.** High blood pressure, high cholesterol and an underactive thyroid all add to risk.
- **Certain medicines and vitamins.** For example, aspirin, diuretics (water pills) and niacin may increase risk.

**See your doctor**

If you think you might have gout, see your doctor for a diagnosis. Similar symptoms may result from a joint infection.

If you have gout, the sooner you're treated, the sooner the pain will go away. Your doctor may be able to tell you what's causing the gout. He or she may prescribe medicine to stop the pain and swelling and even prevent future attacks (see sidebar, "Protect yourself from gout"). Treatment also can prevent long-term joint damage and other complications. Gout usually can be controlled — if you seek help.

**Men's health: From head to toe**

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