

LIVING WELL WITH GOUT



A GUIDE TO MANAGEMENT, SUPPORT, AND RESOURCES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Understanding Gout	2
Causes, Risk Factors, & Diagnosis	3
Gout Is A Whole-Body Disease	5
Why Gout Requires Proactive Care	6
How Gout Progresses	7
Breaking The Stigma Around Gout	8
Building Your Care Team	9
Treatment and Management	10
Self-Management, Complementary, & Behavioral Health Approaches	13
Moving Forward	15
Resources and Help	16
About U.S. Pain Foundation	17

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Understanding Gout

Gout is the most common form of inflammatory arthritis, causing sudden, severe episodes of pain, swelling, and redness in the joints. It develops when uric acid builds up in the body and forms sharp crystals that deposit in joints and surrounding tissues.

These crystal deposits trigger intense inflammation. Many people describe gout pain as stabbing, burning, or unbearable—even the pressure of a bedsheet can feel overwhelming. While the big toe is most commonly affected, gout can impact any joint, including the ankles, knees, wrists, fingers, and elbows.

Gout often begins with occasional flares, but it is not just a series of isolated attacks. It is a chronic, progressive disease. Without proper treatment, uric acid continues to accumulate, even between flares, silently contributing to joint damage and other full-body, serious health complications.

Over time, untreated gout may lead to worsening flares, reduced mobility, and the development of tophi (visible deposits of uric acid crystals under the skin).

LIVING WITH GOUT: WHAT THE NUMBERS SAY

- An estimated **12.1 million American adults** (5.1%) live with gout.
- Gout is the **most common form of inflammatory arthritis**.
- **Men are 3–10 times more likely** to develop gout than women (though risk increases in women after menopause).
- People with gout **face higher risk** for cardiovascular disease, stroke, and kidney complications.
- Nearly 72% of gout flares go **unreported or undertreated**, despite effective treatment options being available.

With early diagnosis and consistent care—not just during flares—gout is highly treatable. Many people can reduce or even eliminate flares and protect their long-term health.



Causes, Risk Factors, and Diagnosis

What Causes Gout

Gout occurs when uric acid builds up in the bloodstream, a condition known as hyperuricemia. Uric acid is a natural waste product formed when the body breaks down purines—substances found in certain foods and in the body's cells.

Normally, uric acid dissolves in the blood and is removed by the kidneys. Gout develops when:

- The body produces too much uric acid
- The kidneys do not remove enough uric acid
- Or both

This leads to crystal formation in joints and tissues.

Risk Factors

Several factors can increase the likelihood of developing gout:

- Family history of gout
- Kidney disease or reduced kidney function
- High blood pressure, diabetes, or heart disease
- Obesity or metabolic syndrome
- Certain medications (e.g., aspirin, diuretics)
- Age and sex (more common in individuals assigned male at birth; risk increases in individuals assigned female at birth after menopause)

Diet may play a role for some individuals, but it is not the sole cause.



Diagnosis

Accurate diagnosis is essential, because gout can resemble other forms of arthritis.

Common diagnostic tools include:

- **Joint fluid analysis** (gold standard): identifies uric acid crystals
- **Blood tests**: measure uric acid levels
- **Ultrasound or imaging**: detect crystals and joint inflammation
- **Dual-energy CT scans (DECT)**: identify uric acid deposits

Gout may be diagnosed by a primary care provider, but many people first learn they have gout during a sudden, severe flare—sometimes in urgent care or the emergency room.

While emergency treatment can provide immediate relief, follow-up care is essential. A rheumatologist may be involved, especially in more complex cases. Early diagnosis helps prevent long-term complications.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

If you experience sudden, intense joint pain—especially in the big toe—seek medical attention. Early diagnosis and treatment can prevent joint damage and reduce the frequency of flares.



Gout Is a Whole-Body Disease

Gout is often thought of as a condition that only affects the joints—but it is actually a **systemic (whole-body) disease**.

The same buildup of uric acid that causes painful joint flares can also affect other organs and systems over time. Gout, particularly when it is untreated, has been linked to a number of other serious diseases.

This does not mean complications are inevitable—but it highlights why gout should be **taken seriously and treated early**.

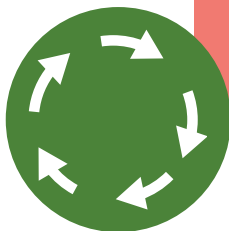
Managing gout is not just about relieving pain. It's about protecting your **entire body and long-term health**.

GOUT AFFECTS MORE THAN YOUR JOINTS

Gout can impact, and has been linked to:

- **Joints** → pain, swelling, damage
- **Kidneys** → kidney stones, reduced function, kidney disease
- **Heart** → increased cardiovascular risk, high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke
- **Metabolism** → diabetes and obesity
- **Sleep** → sleep apnea, insomnia
- **Mental health** → stress, anxiety, depression, isolation

The good news: With proper treatment, many of these risks can be reduced.





RISKS AHEAD

Why Gout Requires Proactive Care

Gout is often dismissed as a minor or temporary condition. In reality, it is a **serious and progressive disease**.

Even when symptoms are not present, uric acid may still be building in the body. Over time, this can cause permanent damage.

Without proper treatment, gout can:

- Affect more joints over time
- Cause permanent joint damage
- Lead to chronic pain, reduced mobility, and disability
- Result in tophi (hard deposits of uric acid crystals under the skin)
- Cause ongoing inflammation—even between flares
- Increase the risk of other serious conditions, including kidney disease, heart disease, and stroke

Gout is treatable, but delaying care increases risk.

Effective treatment focuses on lowering uric acid levels over time, not just managing pain during flares. Many clinical guidelines recommend a target uric acid level of **below 6 mg/dL**—and in some cases, **below 5 mg/dL** for people with more advanced or chronic gout.

Reaching and maintaining this target can:

- Help dissolve existing crystals
- Prevent new ones from forming
- Slow or stop joint damage
- Reduce the risk of flares and long-term complications



How Gout Progresses

Gout is not a one-time event—it is a condition that develops and changes over time.

Some people may go long periods between flares, while others experience more frequent or persistent symptoms. But even between flares, the disease is still active.

This is why ongoing treatment to maintain uric acid targets is so important, even when you feel well.

Gout often follows a general pattern, though it may look different for each person:

- **Early stage:** Uric acid levels are high, but there may be no symptoms
- **Acute flares:** Sudden, intense pain, swelling, and redness in a joint
- **Between flares:** Symptoms improve, but uric acid is still building and the disease continues to progress
- **Chronic or advanced gout:** Flares happen more often, may affect multiple joints, and can lead to visible tophi, joint damage, and other health problems

GOUT IS TREATABLE—BUT TIMING MATTERS

- Gout does not go away between flares
- Uric acid can continue to build—even without symptoms
- Gout is a progressive and systemic disease
- Early treatment can help prevent progression and complications
- Ongoing, consistent management can reduce or even stop flares

In more severe cases, gout may become harder to control and may require specialized care or advanced treatments.

Understanding how gout progresses can help you **take action early and stay consistent with treatment—even when you feel well.**



Breaking the Stigma Around Gout

Gout has long been associated with outdated stereotypes—often linked to overindulgence in food or alcohol. These misconceptions are not only inaccurate but can delay diagnosis and treatment.

Gout is a complex medical condition driven by biology, not just lifestyle factors.

While certain foods or alcohol can trigger flares in some people, they are not the sole cause of the disease. Many individuals with gout:

- Have a strong genetic predisposition
- Have underlying kidney or metabolic conditions
- Take medications that affect uric acid levels

Importantly, research shows that diet alone typically accounts for only a small portion of what contributes to uric acid levels in the body. While dietary changes can support overall disease management and may help reduce flares for some individuals, they are generally not sufficient on their own to control the disease—they typically reduced uric acid levels by less than 1 mg/dL in various studies, while gout treatment usually calls for a larger decrease. Most people with gout require medical management to effectively lower uric acid levels and prevent long-term joint damage.

Stigma can lead people to feel embarrassed or ashamed of their diagnosis, avoid seeking care, or be dismissed or misunderstood by others. This can result in delayed treatment and worse outcomes.

It's important to understand:

- Gout is not caused by lack of willpower
- It is not simply a “diet problem”
- It requires medical management, just like other chronic conditions

Reducing stigma starts with education, open conversation, and recognizing gout as a legitimate and treatable disease.



Building Your Care Team

Because gout affects the whole body, effective care often involves more than one provider.

There are many pathways to diagnosis and care. No matter where you start, building a consistent care team can help you take control of your condition. Depending on your unique needs, your team may include a combination of the following providers.

Key Members

Primary Care Provider

Often the first point of contact. Helps coordinate care and manage overall health.

Rheumatologist

Specializes in inflammatory conditions like gout and often leads long-term management, especially in more complex or persistent cases.

Nephrologist (Kidney Specialist)

Important if kidney disease, kidney stones, or concerns about kidney function are present.



WHEN TO SEE A SPECIALIST

Consider seeing a specialist if:

- Flares are frequent or severe
- Symptoms are not well controlled
- You have joint damage or tophi
- You have kidney disease, cardiovascular conditions, or other complications

Additional Support

- Physical or occupational therapists
- Podiatrists
- Dietitians
- Mental health professionals

A team-based approach helps address both current symptoms and long-term health.



Treatment and Management

Gout treatment focuses on two key goals:

1. Relieving pain and inflammation during flares
2. Lowering uric acid levels long-term to prevent future flares and complications

Most people require **ongoing treatment**, even when they are not experiencing symptoms.

Medications

For Acute Flares (Short-Term Relief)

These medications reduce pain and inflammation during a flare:

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- Colchicine (oral medication; may require dose adjustment in people with kidney disease; use should be guided by a healthcare provider)
- Corticosteroids (oral or injections)

In some cases—especially when standard treatments are not effective or cannot be used—**interleukin-1 (IL-1) inhibitors**, a type of biologic administered by injection, may be prescribed to control inflammation and pain.

For Long-Term Uric Acid Control (Prevention and Management)

These medications help lower uric acid levels and prevent future flares. They are typically adjusted over time to help you reach and maintain a target uric acid level (often below 6 mg/dL), which is key to long-term disease control. These therapies include:

- Allopurinol or febuxostat (oral medications that reduce uric acid production)
- Probenecid (oral medication that helps remove uric acid from the body)
- Biologic therapies (infusions that can rapidly reduce serum uric acid levels in more advanced or treatment-resistant gout)

These treatments must be taken consistently—even when you feel well—to be effective.

If your gout is not improving, it's important to speak with your provider or ask for a referral to a specialist.



Staying consistent with treatment can be challenging. Because gout symptoms may come and go, it can be tempting to skip or stop medications when you're feeling better. However, uric acid can continue to build silently between flares. Missing doses or stopping treatment, even when you feel well, can make it harder to reach target uric acid levels—which may increase the risk of complications and lead to more frequent or severe flares over time.

If you're having trouble staying on track with your treatment plan—*whether due to feeling better, side effects, cost, or uncertainty*—it's important to talk openly with your provider. Adjustments can often be made to better fit your needs.

Advanced and Infusion-Based Treatments

Most people with gout are treated first with **oral medications** that lower uric acid levels over time, such as allopurinol or febuxostat. When taken consistently and monitored appropriately, these treatments are effective for many individuals.

However, for some people, gout remains difficult to control. In these cases, other treatments may be considered, including other medications, injections, infusion therapies—or, rarely, surgery.

Advanced therapies are typically used when:

- Uric acid levels remain high despite treatment
- Flares are still frequent or severe
- Standard medications are not tolerated or cause side effects
- Gout has become chronic or has caused joint damage
- Tophi (visible uric acid deposits) are present

How Infusion Treatments Are Different

Some advanced treatments are given as **intravenous (IV) infusions** in a clinical setting, rather than as daily pills.

These medications work differently from standard therapies. Instead of reducing how much uric acid the body produces, some infusion treatments help **break down uric acid already in the body**, allowing it to be removed more effectively.

What to expect:

- Infusions are given at a clinic or infusion center
- Treatments are typically scheduled every few weeks
- Appointments may last a few hours
- Regular monitoring (including blood tests) is required



Examples of Advanced Therapies

Pegloticase is an FDA-approved biologic infusion therapy for chronic or treatment-resistant gout. It works by converting uric acid into a form that the body can more easily eliminate. Some people experience significant reductions in uric acid levels, flares, and tophi over time.

Emerging therapies are also being studied to improve outcomes and reduce side effects. One example is **nanoencapsulated sirolimus plus pegadricase (NASP)**, a combination therapy designed to both break down uric acid and reduce immune responses that can limit treatment effectiveness. As of now, this treatment is under regulatory review and may become an option in the future.

WHEN TO SPEAK UP ABOUT YOUR TREATMENT

Talk to your provider if:

- You are still having frequent or severe flares
- Your uric acid levels remain elevated
- Your medications are not working or are causing side effects
- You feel your gout is getting worse or affecting your daily life

You may benefit from:

- Adjusting your current treatment
- Adding a new medication
- Seeing a specialist
- Exploring advanced therapies



Self-Management, Complementary, & Behavioral Health Approaches

In addition to medical treatment, many people with gout incorporate supplementary approaches to help manage symptoms, reduce stress, and improve overall well-being.

These strategies can play an important role in quality of life—but they work best **alongside, not instead of**, medical care.

Self-Management Strategies

Daily habits can help reduce flare frequency and support long-term health:

- Stay well hydrated
- Maintain balanced, anti-inflammatory nutrition
- Identify and manage personal flare triggers (when possible)
- Aim for regular, gentle movement
- Implement activity modification, pacing, and rest
- Use assistive and adaptive tools if needed
- Prioritize sleep
- Manage and reduce stress
- Track symptoms, flares, and uric acid levels

Small, consistent changes can make a meaningful difference.



Complementary Approaches

Some individuals explore additional therapies to support comfort and overall wellness:

- Acupuncture or acupressure
- Massage therapy (between flares)
- Gentle holistic practices such as yoga or tai chi
- Nutritional supplements (such as vitamin C or omega-3s, with provider guidance)
- Tart cherry products, which may help reduce flare frequency for some people

Complementary approaches should be used in combination with, rather than in place of, medications and other treatment options. Always talk with your provider about how to integrate these strategies and before starting new approaches, especially supplements, to avoid interactions with medications and ensure they're the best fit for you.

Behavioral and Emotional Health Support

Living with gout can be physically and emotionally challenging. Stress and emotional strain can also make symptoms harder to manage.

Supportive approaches may include:

- Counseling or therapy
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), or psychodynamic approaches
- Biofeedback therapy
- Psychiatric care
- Mindfulness, meditation, or relaxation techniques
- Peer support groups

These methods can help improve coping, reduce stress, and support overall quality of life.



Moving Forward

Gout is a chronic condition, but it is also highly manageable.

With the right care:

- Flares can be reduced or prevented
- Joint damage can be slowed or avoided
- Overall health can improve
- The risk of complications can be reduced

The most important steps you can take:

- Seek early diagnosis
- Stay consistent with treatment
- Build a strong care team
- Advocate for your health

With knowledge, support, and the right treatment plan, you can take control of your condition and move forward with confidence.

Living well with gout is possible.

Connecting with others who truly understand what you're going through can offer relief, validation, and a renewed sense of hope. Peer support groups—whether online, in person, or by phone—provide a safe space to share experiences, learn coping strategies, and receive encouragement from others living with gout. Many also offer helpful education on managing symptoms and navigating the emotional impact of chronic pain.

Join one of U.S. Pain Foundation's free online peer support groups at painconnection.org, or find shared understanding and support through the Gout Support Group of America at goutsupportgroup.org.

Resources and Help

Many organizations and groups support individuals with gout by providing education, awareness, resources, and support. They include:

Patient advocacy and nonprofit organizations

Alliance for Gout Awareness: goutalliance.org

Alliance for Patient Access: allianceforpatientaccess.org

American Association of Kidney Patients: aakp.org

American Kidney Fund: kidneyfund.org

Arthritis Foundation: arthritis.org

Global Healthy Living Foundation: ghlf.org

Gout Education Society: gouteducation.org

Gout Support Group of America: goutsupportgroup.org

HealthyWomen: healthywomen.org

Infusion Access Foundation: infusionaccessfoundation.org

Lupus and Allied Diseases Association: ladainc.org

Men's Health Network: menshealthnetwork.org

National Kidney Foundation: kidney.org

U.S. Pain Foundation: uspainfoundation.org

Suicide hotlines and help

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988 | 988lifeline.org

Crisis Text Line: Text "HOME" (or "HOLA" for a Spanish response) to 741741 | crisistextline.org

About U.S. Pain Foundation

The U.S. Pain Foundation is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is to empower, educate, connect, and advocate for all individuals who live with a chronic illness or serious injury that causes pain, as well as their caregivers or care partners and clinicians.

We are deeply invested in helping individuals through our programs and services, which are all free to patients, their families, and their providers. These include:

- ***INvisible Project*** - A print and online magazine sharing the personal stories of people living with chronic pain.
- **State and Federal Advocacy** - We fight for change at the state and federal levels, advocating for direct and affordable access to individualized, multidisciplinary pain care.
- **Pain Connection** - A national network of free online peer support groups. Trained volunteer peer leaders host state, national, daily, and specialized and affinity population meetings.
- **Pediatric Pain Warrior Program** - Serves children and their families through a family summer camp, in-depth retreats, programming featuring expert speakers, and more.
- **Building Your Toolbox** - A monthly virtual educational series teaching individuals a pain management strategy or skill.
- **MyPainPlan.org** - An interactive site allowing individuals to explore 85+ types of treatments and create a personalized list to discuss with medical providers.
- **Storybank** - A tool to share your story online.
- **Volunteer Network** - Shifting public perception of chronic pain through local outreach, education, and advocacy.
- **Awareness Months** - Promoting greater understanding of specific pain-related topics through activities, events, and initiatives during Pain Awareness Month in September and KNOWember in November.

Learn more at uspainfoundation.org.

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