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Gout diet: What's allowed, what's not

Definition

Gout, a painful form of arthritis, has long been associated with diet, particularly overindulgence in meat, seafood and alcohol. As a result, gout treatment used to include severe dietary restrictions, which made the gout diet hard to stick to. Fortunately, newer medications to treat gout have reduced the need for such a strict diet.

Newer diet recommendations resemble a healthy-eating plan recommended for most people. Besides helping you maintain a healthy weight and avoid several chronic diseases, this diet may contribute to better overall management of your gout.

Purpose

Gout occurs when high levels of uric acid in your blood cause crystals to form and accumulate around a joint. Your body produces uric acid when it breaks down purines. Purines occur naturally in your body, but you also get them from eating certain foods, such as organ meats, anchovies, herring, asparagus and mushrooms.

A gout diet helps to control the production and elimination of uric acid, which may help prevent gout attacks or reduce their severity. The diet isn't a treatment for gout, but may help you control your attacks. Obesity also is a risk factor for gout, so losing weight can help you lower your risk of attacks.

Diet details

A gout diet reduces your intake of foods that are high in purines, such as animal products, which helps control your body's production of uric acid. The diet also limits alcohol, particularly beer, which has been linked to gout attacks. If you're overweight or obese, lose weight. However, avoid fasting and rapid weight loss because these can promote a gout attack. Drink plenty of fluids to help flush uric acid from your body. Also avoid high-protein weight-loss diets, which can cause you to produce too much uric acid (hyperuricemia).

To follow the diet:

- **Limit meat, poultry and fish.** Animal proteins are high in purine. Avoid or severely limit high-purine foods, such as organ meats, herring, anchovies and mackerel. Red meat (beef, pork and lamb), fatty fish and seafood (tuna, shrimp, lobster and scallops) are associated with increased risk of gout. Because all meat, poultry and fish contain purines, limit your intake. See the Chart below to find out how much protein you should eat per day for your weight.

Amount of Protein Per Day		
Weight	120-150 lbs	43-54 grams
	160-190 lbs	58-68 grams
	200-230 lbs	72-83 grams

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- **Cut back on fat.** Saturated fat lowers the body's ability to eliminate uric acid. Choosing plant-based protein, such as beans and legumes, and low-fat or fat-free dairy products will help you cut down the amount of saturated fat in your diet. High-fat meals also contribute to obesity, which is linked to gout.

- **Limit or avoid alcohol.** Alcohol interferes with the elimination of uric acid from your body. Drinking beer, in particular, has been linked to gout attacks. If you're having an attack, avoid all alcohol. However, when you're not having an attack, drinking one or two 5-ounce (148-milliliter) servings a day of wine is not likely to increase your risk.

- **Limit or avoid foods sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup.** Fructose is the only carbohydrate known to increase uric acid. It is best to avoid beverages sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup, such as soft drinks or juice drinks. Juices that are 100 percent fruit juice do not seem to stimulate uric acid production as much.

What TO Eat if You Have Gout

• Dietary restrictions suggest what people should not eat, but people want to know what they should eat. The American Medical Association recommends the following dietary guidelines for people with gout, advising them to eat a diet:

• high in complex carbohydrates (fiber-rich whole grains, fruits, and vegetables)

• low in protein (15% of calories and sources should be soy, lean meats, or poultry)

• no more than 30% of calories in fat (with only 10% animal fats)

• Choose low-fat or fat free dairy products.

• Drink Plenty of fluids, mostly water. Fluids can help remove uric acid from your body. 8 to 16 oz is water daily is recommended.

Recommended Foods to Eat

• Fresh cherries, strawberries, blueberries, and other red-blue berries

• Bananas

• Celery

• Tomatoes

• Vegetables including kale, cabbage, parsley, green-leafy vegetables

• Foods high in bromelain (pineapple)

• Foods high in vitamin C (red cabbage, red bell peppers, tangerines, mandarins,(oranges, potatoes)

• Drink fruit juices and purified water (8 glasses of water per day)

• Low-fat dairy products

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- Complex carbohydrates (breads, cereals, pasta, rice, as well as aforementioned vegetables and fruits)
- Chocolate, cocoa
- Coffee, tea
- Carbonated beverages
- Essential fatty acids (tuna and salmon, flaxseed, nuts, seeds)
- Tofu, although a legume and made from soybeans, may be a better choice than meat

Foods considered moderately high in purines which may not raise the risk of gout include: asparagus, cauliflower, mushrooms, peas, spinach, whole grain breads and cereals, chicken, duck, ham, turkey, kidney and lima beans. It is important to remember that purines are found in all protein foods. But, all sources of purines should not be eliminated. Be reasonable with your choices.

A sample menu

Here's a look at what you might eat during a typical day on a gout diet:

Breakfast

- Whole-grain, unsweetened cereal with skim or low-fat milk, topped with fresh fruit
- Whole-wheat toast with trans-free margarine
- 100 percent fruit juice
- Coffee

Lunch

- Lean meat, poultry or fish (2 to 3 ounces) sandwich on whole-wheat bread, with lettuce, tomato and low-fat spread
- Carrot and celery sticks, side salad or vegetable soup
- Fresh fruit, such as apple, orange or pear
- Skim or low-fat milk

Dinner

- Baked or roasted chicken (2 to 3 ounces)
- Steamed vegetables
- Baked potato with low-fat sour cream
- Green salad with tomatoes and low-fat dressing
- Fresh fruit, such as berries or melon

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- Nonalcoholic beverage, such as water or tea

Snacks can be added to this menu as long as you make healthy choices — such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and occasional nuts — and you are at a healthy weight or stay within your calorie limit.

Results

Following a gout diet can help you limit your body's uric acid production and increase its elimination. It's not likely to lower the uric acid concentration in your blood enough to treat your gout without medication, but it may help decrease the number of attacks and limit their severity.

Following the gout diet and limiting your calories — particularly if you also add in moderate daily exercise, such as brisk walking — can also improve your overall health by helping you achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Risks

The gout diet isn't that different from the healthy-eating patterns recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Thus, the risks of following the diet are few, if any.