Understanding Gout and How to Practice Self-Care

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Self-Care for Gout Flares

Simply stated, gout is the result of uric acid build-up in the joints of the body, but the way it affects your daily routine can be more complicated. While medication plays a crucial role in most gout treatment plans, what you do at home is just as important as keeping your doctor's appointments. Learn some simple yet effective ways to protect against gout attacks, plus some changes to make for a comfortable life now, and for years to come.

Adopt a Gout-Friendly Diet

Gout attacks can be traced to purines, substances in some food and beverages that increase uric acid levels in the blood. Too much uric acid results in the clusters of tiny crystals that can settle in your joints and cause a lot of pain, but the good news is that you can control your uric acid levels with the foods and beverages you choose.

Some of the best foods to include in your regular diet include:

- Fresh vegetables
- Orchard fruits
- Whole grains
- Milk and low-fat dairy yogurt
- Lots of fresh water

You'll also need to eliminate certain purine-rich foods to keep your uric acid levels under control. Alcohol (especially beer) is a major culprit in gout attacks, as is shellfish, organ meat, rich sauces, soda pop and orange juice. Many foods that are fine in small amounts can trigger an attack if you have too much, so be cautious with anything that's high in animal fat, caffeine or fructose. Crash diets can also lead to a sharp increase in uric acid levels, so make healthy diet changes gradually for good results. You can learn more about following an effective diet for gout here.

Stay Active to Fight Flare-ups

Weight loss is a key component in gout self-care, and while it may not directly lower uric acid levels, it does help the body better protect against, and recover from, gout attacks. An obese person is four times more likely to develop gout than a person at a healthy weight, so it's important to make time for regular activity.

A half hour of moderate activity like walking, cycling, swimming or even household chores each day will help you lose extra pounds and keep your sore joints limber and lubricated. But keep in mind that exercise can strain inflamed joints, so if you're in the midst of a gout attack, rest and appropriate spot treatment is a better choice than a long walk.

Learn How to Treat Attacks

Even if you do your best to keep a good diet, an attack can hit when you least expect it. Proper preparation will help you squash the painful symptoms before they interfere with your day:

- **Elevate and ice the joint.** Apply an ice pack to the sore joint for 10 to 20 minutes at a time, which should reduce inflammation and numb the pain.
- **Remove clothing and bedding.** Even the slight pressure of a sheet can feel like torture to an inflamed joint, so strip down and rest up until the attack passes.
- **Using the right medications.** NSAIDs like ibuprofen are excellent, fast-acting remedies for inflamed muscles and joints. Unless you have renal disease, this is the best medication to take for quick relief during a gout attack.

Since gout can strike fiercely and suddenly, it’s common to feel helpless and vulnerable. In reality, you have quite a lot of control over your disease, as long as you stick to a proactive plan. Stay optimistic and celebrate the small victories and advances you make, and you’ll begin to notice a variety of positive changes almost immediately. Let us know which of these self-care for gout flares tips you have incorporated into your routine and any results you have noticed!