What You Need to Know about Elbow Gout

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Gout in Elbow

Gout is a type of inflammatory arthritis caused by uric acid buildup in the joints. Uric acid is created when the body breaks down substances called purines found in some foods and drinks, including liver, beans, and beer.

Gout in the elbow is rare but usually seen in people who have lived with gout for many years or whose gout isn't well managed.

What is Gout?

Gout develops when too much uric acid in the body accumulates in the blood. The excessive uric acid causes the formation of crystals that find their way to the joints and surrounding tissues.

Your body treats gout crystals as invaders and the result is inflammation. The process is quick and gout spots can appear overnight.

Gout can affect any joints or tissues but the most commonly affected joint is the big toe. The hands, hips, knees, ankles, and elbows may also be effected by gout.

Increased uric acid can also cause crystal formations (kidney stones) in the kidneys which could potentially cause kidney damage.

About Elbow Gout

Much like gout in a big toe, gout in the elbow is caused by a buildup of uric acid in the blood. Sometimes excess uric acid forms crystals that deposit themselves into your elbow joints.

Once crystals form in the elbow joints, swelling, redness, and pain will occur and the area may even appear infected.

The symptoms of gout in the elbow appear unexpectedly.

You may have no signs of a problem in your elbow but then you wake up the following morning and your elbow is inflamed and extremely painful. The slightest touch, such as your clothing touching your elbow, brings about pain.

Most people believe gout develops in the elbow joint but it actually forms in the bursa sac. This is the small cushioning sac at the tip of the elbow, between your bone and skin.

Because elbow gout develops in the bursa, it might be mistaken for bursitis. The latter condition is either the result of an injury or from repetitive movement that causes the bursa sac to become inflamed.

The best way to determine if your elbow inflammation, swelling, and fluid buildup is gout is with an aspiration test. Your doctor will use a needle to draw fluid from the elbow and the sample will be examined under a microscope to look for gout crystals.

If you experience frequent episodes of elbow gout, you might develop tophi. This occurs when gout crystals build up under the skin and forms white or yellow lumps.

Tophi are generally painless but are inconvenient and makes everyday tasks, like getting dressed, harder to do. These lumps can also become inflamed and produce a thick white discharge.

Elbow Gout Risk Factors

Certain risk factors are associated with the development of gout in the elbow and worsening symptoms. It is possible elbow gout is a result of unmanaged gout or gout that has worsened over time.

Risk factors for gout and elbow gout include:

Age and sex

Your risk for gout is higher if you are a man but women can also get gout. As a man, you're likely to develop gout in middle age and as a woman, gout often develops after menopause.

Diet

If your diet is high in meat, seafood, sweetened beverages, and alcohol, you are more likely to have higher uric levels and worsening gout symptoms.

Being overweight

If you are overweight, your body produces more uric acid and your kidneys may not be able to eliminate it all.

Medical illnesses

Some diseases, including kidney disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes make it difficult for the body to rid itself of excess uric acid and might result in worsened and uncontrolled gout symptoms.

Medications

The medications you may be taking to manage high blood pressure and certain immunosuppressants have been linked to gout flares.

Family history

If you have a family history of gout, your risk for gout is increased.

Recent trauma or surgery

Trauma to your elbow or elbow surgery may cause uric buildup and crystal formation in your elbow.

Treatment of Elbow Gout

The goals for elbow gout treatment are pain relief and reducing swelling, as well as preventing future gout attacks and protecting joints and tissues from damage.

Some medications to manage elbow gout include NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) and steroids.

NSAIDs can provide pain relief for joint symptoms while oral and injectable steroids bring down inflammation.

Another drug therapy is a medication specifically designed to treat gout called Colchicine. This medication is taken to ease pain and symptoms of a gout attack.

Other medications for gout help to control uric levels in the body and with flushing out and keeping uric acid from accumulating in the blood.

During a gout attack in the elbow, you should rest your elbow and arm until the gout attack passes. Light compression of the joint can help but you shouldn't keep your elbow compressed for too long or too tight or while you are sleeping.

Cold compresses can also help to bring down swelling and inflammation. Elevation of the joint above your heart helps too.

Surgery is considered when there is elbow joint damage and when there is a need to restore joint function.

You can prevent gout attacks and keep uric levels down by watching your diet, being active, and losing weight.

Conclusion

If you experience gout attacks in your elbow, chances are this is an indicator your gout treatments aren't working or you are not making appropriate lifestyle changes to keep symptoms at bay. This is a good reminder for you to make the necessary lifestyle changes for managing gout and to discuss other treatment options with your doctor.