Tips for Leading a Healthy Lifestyle With Gout

by ANGELA FINLAY

Quick and Simple Ways to Make Living With Gout Easier

The inflammation and excruciating pain of gout can hit suddenly, and it can become a chronic problem if you don't make some smart changes. The key to living with gout and reducing flares is to lower the amount of uric acid in your bloodstream, so painful crystals don't have a chance to form.

Purines found in food certainly are a problem, but simply following a low-purine diet probably isn't your best bet. In theory, limiting purines means limiting uric acid buildup; in reality, a low-purine diet is complicated to manage and may not have the effect on your blood uric acid levels that you had hoped.

Instead, focus on balance in your diet, and life in general. A wholesome menu packed with variety can get you on track to lower uric acid levels and lower body weight, while exercise, relaxation and smart supplements can energize your system and improve your natural defenses.

The Most Important Dietary Changes to Make When Living With Gout

Gout raises your risk of developing other health problems like cardiovascular disease, insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome, so you need to tailor your diet to account for your specific risks. For instance, moderate drinking and oily fish (chock-full of omega-3 fatty acids) aren't necessarily great for gout, but they can help in the fight against heart disease.

Work with your doctor to balance the benefits and risks based on the severity of your gout, and any other conditions at play in your body. Everyone is different, and you'll need a personalized plan to tackle the challenges you face. However, here are some good general rules for anyone with gout to follow:

Add More Veggies

Full of water, nutrients, minerals and fiber, fresh vegetables should take center stage in your gout management plan. A good way to get more variety of vegetables is to serve a salad with each meal, and experiment with fresh side dishes to replace starchy grains and potatoes.

Some vegetables have less purine than others, but evidence shows these plant purines don't have the same negative effect on the body as other purine sources. Even high-purine veggies like mushrooms, asparagus, peas and spinach can do your body good.

Focus on Beans and Whole Grains

You can get your protein from beans and legumes, your minerals from leafy greens, and your fiber and fat-fighting energy from whole grains (quinoa and barley are excellent examples).

The wonderful thing about beans and whole grains is they're exceptionally filling, but relatively low in calories. For anyone trying to lose a bit of weight, this is very good news: regular servings of beans, legumes and grains will help manage cravings and hunger, all while reducing your calorie intake.

Limit Meat

Animal protein tops the list of purine-rich foods, especially red meat, organ meats and seafood. Everything from mussels to liver could leave you in agony, but not everyone will respond to all meats the same way.

If you aren't ready to give up meat entirely, at least choose wisely and limit your intake. Stick to animal products lower on the purine scale — chicken, turkey, salmon and haddock are better options — and eat no more than six ounces per day. Try to get most of your protein from beans and dairy instead of meat.

Avoid Most Alcohol

Beer is the biggest offender when it comes to gout attacks, but other alcohols can be problematic, too. High purine levels in alcohol can interfere with your body's natural ability to eliminate uric acid, which leads to painful crystals lodging in the joints.

Doctors recommend you avoid alcohol completely when you're having a gout attack, but even if your gout isn't acting up, you may want to steer clear of wine, beer and spirits as a general rule.

Work in Low-Fat Dairy

There's evidence dairy products can help your body get rid of excess uric acid to calm gout flares and protect against future attacks. It appears cow's milk can suppress the enzyme known as xanthine oxidase, which helps to produce uric acid.

Next page: More dietary advice, the best activities to prevent gout attacks, and other living with gout tips.

The Most Important Dietary Changes to Make When Living With Gout

Dairy products carry a lot of healthy compounds, but they can also upset your balanced diet. Full-fat dairy will probably add too many calories for weight loss, so stick to low-fat yogurt, cottage cheese and skim milk most of the time.

Drink More Water

There's no magical elixir for a gout-free life, but water comes pretty close. Water flushes out your kidneys, diluting your urine and helping to pass uric acid more frequently. Everyone should aim to drink between eight and 16 cups of liquid each day, and at least half of that should be clean, pure water.

Sticking to all of these gout food rules will work for you in two important ways. First, you'll develop less uric acid by taking in fewer purines, and secondly, you'll start to shed excess weight by avoiding the most infamous high-calorie foods. Since being overweight is a huge risk factor for gout, the closer you stay to your ideal weight, the better you'll protect yourself from painful attacks.

Best Activities to Prevent Gout Attacks

It's no secret that regular exercise is the best complement to a healthy diet when it comes to weight loss, so begin to work some more activity into each day. You will start to shed weight relatively quickly, and with every excess pound you drop, your uric acid levels will decrease, as will your risk of comorbid disease.

Moderate intensity exercise is helpful for heart health, energy levels and strength. Most adults should try to fit a

half hour of exercise into each day, making sure to keep the intensity high enough to break a sweat.

Depending on your current fitness level, that could mean walking up a hill, running around the block or cycling. Listen to your body, and your doctor, for cues to push harder or pull back.

Supplement Wisely

There's no replacement for a well-balanced diet, but sometimes you could use a little boost, and this is where supplements come into play. In the case of gout, two compounds have proven especially helpful:

Vitamin C

Some studies have shown that vitamin C can reduce the frequency of gout attacks, since it lowers uric acid levels. Cherries are particularly helpful sources (they are known to decrease inflammation, too), but a daily supplement (500mg up to 1000mg) is another option.

Coffee

It's known for its caffeine, but other components in coffee might be even more useful for gout patients. Research shows the more coffee you consume, the lower your uric acid levels.

Since this effect was not found in tea drinkers, scientists believe the improvement comes from coffee's antioxidant levels and positive impact on insulin resistance.

Patience and flexibility are two of the most valuable virtues you could have when dealing with a chronic disease. If your current gout diet isn't working as well as you had hoped, it's time to experiment with some healthy changes.

Can't commit to a full workout each and every day? Try splitting it up into 10 or 15 minutes bursts of activity here and there. The more open you are to trying new approaches, the more likely you'll land on the perfect plan for your body and lifestyle.