So, What Exactly Is Uric Acid? And How Is It Connected to Gout?

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Acid Linked to Gout

Gout is a condition that occurs when there is an accumulation of urate crystals or uric acids in one of your joints, typically in the toe. This causes inflammation which gout sufferers are very familiar with. It's a painful swelling that lasts from hours to days.

A precursor to gout is hyperuricemia, a condition where a person has high levels of uric acid in the blood. You are considered to have hyperuricemia if your uric acid is above 8mg/dl (for men) or 7mg/dl (for women). Because gout involves high acid levels in the body, we're interested in what its role is in the body.

What Is Uric Acid?

Uric acid is the acid linked to gout; it's the chemical that is created in the body after it breaks down substances called purines. Purines are naturally produced in the body, but they can also be in the foods and drinks we consume. The higher the purine content, the higher its uric acid byproduct will be.

The uric acid linked to gout is then dissolved and processed by the kidneys. This is where gout sufferers come in. They develop the condition because they either consume too much high purine foods or their body cannot remove enough uric acid.

Risks for Gout

Gout is often associated with high meat and alcohol consumption. It comes as no surprise since these two are very high in purines. In fact, did you know that gout used to be called "the disease of kings"? Back then, only royals and the wealthy were able to indulge in food and wine. Today, this myth is not so true anymore as gout can affect anyone.

There are a number of risk factors that make you more susceptible to having this condition. If you are a male, have a family history of gout, are obese, have poorly functioning kidneys, or have recently undergone surgery or trauma, you may develop gout. Taking certain medications such as aspirin, diuretics, cyclosporine and levodopa also increases your risk for gout.

Other huge risk factors, as indicated earlier, are your diet and alcohol use. If you are not careful about your consumption of these, you may have gout later on. This condition tends to develop later in life when a person is in their 40s to 60s, sometimes even 80s. So, it can take a long time of maintaining bad habits before you realize how bad you've really been.

Think of uric acid as a set of matches. It can be in your cartilage or joints for years without any symptoms. And then, all of a sudden, it becomes too much that all the matches are struck and the inflammation begins.

Because of this, you don’t want to be lenient with your lifestyle choices, particularly your diet. You want to pay attention to high-purine foods because too much of these will trigger a gout attack.

Gout and Meat Consumption

One particular food that gout patients have a hard time reducing is meat. The good news is, you don’t have to completely give it up. A study proves that completely removing meat products from your diet is not necessarily beneficial for reducing uric acid levels. When comparing serum uric acid concentration in vegans, vegetarians and meat eaters, they found that vegans had the highest levels, next to meat eaters, with vegetarians being the last.

There’s comfort in knowing you don’t have to completely give up meat. You just have to recognize which ones are bad for you and limit your consumption of them. The worst type of meat that you should avoid when you have gout are organ meats. This includes liver, kidneys, heart, brains, tongue, tripe and other organs of an animal.

There are many claims that some organ meats are nutrient dense, but the fact is, they still cause a gout attack. So, it doesn’t matter if they say it’s good for you, if you have gout, you should completely avoid it.

You also need to be wary of processed meats. The most common ones are hotdogs, sausages, bacon, ham, beef jerky, pepperoni, beef patties and chicken nuggets. There are also more food items that fall under this category. Basically, anything that has been preserved by curing, salting, smoking, drying or canning is considered processed meat.

The main reason to avoid this is its nitrite content which is carcinogenic. It’s also high in sodium which can reduce your tolerance for sugars over time. We’ll be discussing later why it’s important to control your sugar consumption as well. Instead of buying processed meat, you can make your own instead. This way, you’ll know exactly what goes in it.

The best meat to consume for gout is lean meat from chicken, beef, turkey, lamb, pork and duck. Consume these in moderation and limit the red meat to only twice a week and you should be fine.

Gout and Sugar

Another big food item that raises your risk for gout flares are sugary foods. This is scarier than meat because sugar can be found in foods that you least expect like ketchup, sauces, salad dressing, non-dairy milk, crackers, bread, tonic water and protein powder.

Unlike natural sugars found in fruits, the added sugars in these food items are often classified as high-fructose corn syrup (HCFS) which increases uric acid in the blood. It also affects your body’s ability to excrete uric acid efficiently.

For this reason, you should try to avoid foods that contain artificial sugars. This includes soft drinks, fruit juices, pastries, fruit preserves, iced teas, syrups, fruit yogurts and energy drinks. Artificial sugar has become so prevalent in Western culture that it’s practically impossible to avoid them.

If you need to satisfy a sweet craving, your best option is fruit. Yes, some fruits are high in purines, while some are low. What makes them different from artificial sweeteners, however, is their high vitamin and mineral content. This neutralizes their purine content, making them beneficial for you anyway.

But if you want to be absolutely sure that your uric acid levels are low, opt for low purine fruits like apples, pears, pineapples and avocados. Feel free to also indulge in fruits high in vitamin C like oranges, tangerines, papaya and cherries, since these are known to be beneficial for gout.

In Conclusion

I hope this gave more clarity on the acid linked to gout (uric acid) and how to manage your levels. Now onto you.

What was your uric acid level when you were first diagnosed with hyperuricemia or gout? What steps did you take to remedy it? Share your thoughts in the comments below.