Identifying the Visible Signs of Gout: What Does It Look Like?

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What Does Gout Look Like?

You've probably heard about gout, but you may wonder, "What does gout look like?" In this article, we take a look at the physical characteristics of someone with gout condition, why it is this way, and what you can do to treat it.

What Exactly is Gout?

To start, gout is a form of arthritis that is caused by high uric acid levels in the body. Men over the age of 40 are more prone to this inflammatory arthritis. Someone with gout will often experience sudden severe attacks in the joints. The most common joint that is affected is the big toe. During a gout attack, this area can feel very painful and swollen, and tender; the joint will also look red. You might even notice that the side with the affected toe looks bigger than the other foot. The gout patient will need to take medication, such as NSAIDs, to get relief from the pain.

The pain usually subsides after a few days. But sometimes, it can take weeks for it to fully go away. The red and swollen appearance might not be there anymore, but the gout patient will still feel some lingering discomfort in their joints.

The same physical manifestations can also happen in other affected joints, not just the toe. Gout sufferers can also experience joint pain in areas like the knees, ankles, elbows, wrists, and fingers. However, there are a few distinctions in how they appear. For instance, in the elbow, gout does not always look red or swollen, but instead, it will look lumpy. It appears fine but for the patient, it can be very painful.

What Severe Gout Looks Like

In more severe cases, you might see a huge lump around the affected joint. This is called tophi, and if you are not careful, your gout condition could develop into this. Tophi means there's already uric acid deposits in the joints, and it can be extremely painful. There are drugs that can help dissolve tophi in joints but sometimes surgery is already needed to remove it because it might hinder the patient's ability to move normally. Tophi might also have to be drained and treated with antibiotics if it gets infected.

Once removed, tophi looks like whitish or yellowish deposits. Gout patients can experience great relief once tophi is removed, but this does not completely solve their problem, as uric acid crystals can build up again in the area. If the patient's lifestyle remains the same, gout eventually impacts not just the joints, but the tendons and other tissues as well.

How Can Gout be Treated?

Changing Your Diet

Thankfully, gout can be remedied through a couple of ways. First is with a lifestyle change. To avoid getting those gout attacks, one needs to make a drastic change in their diet. This is because most uric acid comes from the purines in food that we eat. The higher the purine content, the more uric acid is broken down in the body. Gout patients are often advised to avoid high purine food items, such as seafood, red meat, sugar, and alcohol.

Staying Active

In addition, gout patients need to start getting active. It may seem counterintuitive to do so when you experience joint pain, but exercise actually does a lot of good for gout. It helps you lose the excess weight that could be exacerbating your pain, and it makes your joints stronger.

It is normal to meet a newly diagnosed gout patient who is overweight or obese. They may find it easier to get to their ideal weight when they add physical activity into their routine. No need for anything intense like weightlifting or CrossFit. With gout, any exercise is good as long as it gets your heart pumping and your heart moving.

Begin with gentle movement exercises and build up the intensity of your workouts slowly so you can avoid injury. This also ensures you are losing weight steadily, as a drastic weight loss in a short amount of time can be a precursor for gout.

Cultivating Healthy Daily Habits

Aside from diet and exercise, you can also do simple habits that help promote a healthier you, such as drinking lots of water, eating mostly fruits and vegetables, taking apple cider vinegar, drinking ginger tea, lemon juice, and taking Epsom salt baths. All these are good for your overall health but if you are consistent in doing them, your gout condition will greatly improve as well.

Taking Prescribed Medication

Gout also requires you to take medication. Your doctor will prescribe you the appropriate drug depending on the reason for why you have gout. There’s a drug for patients whose bodies produce too much uric acid and there is a drug for patients whose bodies are unable to excrete uric acid efficiently. The most common medicines for gout are allopurinol, colchicine, probenecid, and febuxostat.

It’s important to be fully transparent with your doctor so they can prescribe you the appropriate medication. In some instances, you might even be referred to a rheumatologist who can better treat your gout condition.

Home Remedies for Gout

Then, there are alternative remedies you can try at home. To start, you can consume foods that are high in vitamin C and antioxidants, as these are known to keep uric acid under control. Coffee is also one beverage that can lower your risk for a gout attack.

Taking supplements is also a good idea. A popular one that is recommended for gout patients are cherry supplements. It’s the best food item you can consume for gout. A bowl of cherries a day is enough to keep those attacks away, but if that is too much, cherries in supplement form are just as good.

Bromelain supplements are also good for gout. This enzyme can be found in pineapple leaf. Unfortunately, there is not many dishes that call for this ingredient, so you may as well take it in supplement form as well. Bromelain fights inflammation caused by gout.