Gout in Hands: Symptoms and Seeking a Diagnosis

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What to Know About Gout in Hands

Gout is a type of inflammatory arthritis that is typically associated with lower body joint pains, especially in older male patients. The pain usually starts with the big toe but can progress to the lesser toes, ankles and knees. Gout in hands can also occur.

Alternatively, gout in hands affects the upper body joints like the wrists, knuckles and elbows. While gout in hands tends to be less painful, the debilitating effects are just as bad.

Studies have shown that cases of gout have been increasing since the 1990s as reported by Mayo Clinic. Unfortunately, the data shows that the increase in cases includes both older and younger patients, as well as males and females.

How Widespread is Gout?

In the U.S., it is estimated that as many as 5 million people may be suffering from gout pain. However, many people chalk it up to be an accidental injury and never get the official diagnosis.

Gout flares can affect pretty much any joint in the body. Therefore, the sooner you get treatment the better your chances are of avoiding pain and potential complications.

Fortunately, there are many effective treatments for mitigating the painful and debilitating effects of gout. Let’s take a closer look at what gout in hands is, how to identify it and the treatment options available.

What is Gout?

Gout is the most common form of inflammatory arthritis in men. However, gout pain can also develop in women and usually after menopause.

Some of the earliest indications of gout pain as a medical condition can be traced back to Egyptian records from 2640 BCE. In fact, Hippocrates even took note of gout pain’s high male-to-female ratio!

Over time, the link between gout pain and an inactive lifestyle that consisted of gluttonous eating and alcohol consumption started becoming more evident. Centuries ago, such a lifestyle was a “luxury” that only the rich could afford.

What Causes Gout in Hands?

Sadly, the increasing amount of gout cases we see today is more correlated to obesity than to our bags of gold. With more people around the world consuming sweetened soft drinks, red meat and alcohol, the surge in gout

cases was inevitable.

Gout in hands is caused when excess uric acid starts forming sharp crystals in the joints. The body naturally produces uric acid to help break down substances called purines. Purines are found naturally in our bodies and in the foods we eat, especially red meat, seafood and beer.

Uric acid normally dissolves in the blood and goes through the kidneys and is finally released via the urine. However, when purine levels become excessive, the body can overproduce uric acid. The kidneys, in turn, may struggle to get rid of all the excess uric acid. This condition is known as hyperuricemia.

The leftover uric acids eventually start hardening into needle-like urate crystals in the joints or surrounding tissue areas. As the formations develop, they trigger an aggressive inflammatory response from the body's immune system which results in sharp pains, stiffness and inflammation.

Other risk factors that can cause the development of gout in hands include genetics, certain medications (i.e., medications that control hypertension) and recent surgery or trauma.

Severe Cases of Gout in Hands

Chronic cases of gout can lead to the development of bumps under the skin and near the affected joint area. These visible bumps are known as tophi and are uric acid deposits that resemble small, chalky nodules.

Over time, the continued growth of tophi can lead to grotesque deformities of the joints. Needless to say, these deformities create additional complications like limited movement, ulcerations, necrosis and nerve compression, to name a few.

For chronic cases of gout tophi, getting them surgically removed by a doctor is usually recommended.

Symptoms of Gout in Hands

Despite the sharp pains, most people see some swelling and redness in their skin and chalk it up to a bad sprain. As a result, many people do not get their condition diagnosed and try to manage gout flares on their own.

The longer your gout in hands remains untreated, the worse pain and joint damage you may suffer. Here are some of the most common symptoms of gout:

- **Sharp joint pain.** Gout pain can strike suddenly, and it hits hard. This can wake you up in the middle of the night or on the drive home from work.
- **Prolonged period of discomfort.** Most bad sprains are gone after a few days. Gout pain, on the other hand, can persist for up to two weeks.
- **Inflammation, tenderness and red skin.** The inflammation can cause your joints to swell significantly and makes the skin tender and warm to the touch. In addition, you may notice a much more limited range of motion in your joints.

Treatment Options for Gout in Hands

There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to treating gout in hands. Each case must be treated individually with the goal of helping to reduce pain and prevent future flare-ups.

Fortunately, there are various medications and drugs which can alleviate the pain and swelling. Other medications can also help with rebalancing the levels of uric acid in the body.

However, one of the most effective ways to mitigate the occurrence of flare-ups entails making lifestyle changes as follows:

- Avoiding foods high in fructose corn syrup-sweeteners, as well as foods with a high concentration of purines. Instead, increase your consumption in fruits, vegetables and grains.
- Exercise on a regular basis with an eye on maintaining an adequate level of weight according to your height and age.

Of course, committing to a lifestyle change and sticking to it is much easier said than done. Many people try to manage their gout in hands on their own for months or even years before seeking treatment by a doctor.

Many do not seek treatment at all, which is a huge shame since gout in hands is a practically curable condition.

Gout in hands is a very serious medical condition. If you feel you may be suffering from many of the symptoms mentioned above, go seek an appointment with your nearest doctor immediately to get a gout diagnosis.