What You Need to Know About Exercising With Gout

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The Ins and Outs of Gout and Exercise

As you may have guessed, regular exercise is a good idea for just about everyone. It helps keep weight in check, stave off chronic disease, and boost your energy and outlook. As it turns out, exercise can bring even more benefits to people who suffer from gout.

Your diet and genetics play a big role in how gout affects your life, but an active lifestyle can help every part of your gout management plan work more efficiently. Learn why exercise is crucial for comfort, and how to go about it when your gout symptoms threaten to immobilize you.

The Benefits (and Limits) of Exercise for Gout

Exercise is equally helpful for the mind and body, and this can be enormously helpful for anyone suffering from a chronic condition. For those with gout, regular activity can impact your risk of attacks, severity of symptoms, and recovery.

On the other hand, it is not a cure-all — you will need to use it in conjunction with other helpful lifestyle changes to see the best results.

Weight Control Lowers Gout Risk

Carrying too much extra weight is a top risk factor for gout. Many people with gout have high triglyceride levels (fat in the bloodstream), which points to a pattern of fatty diet and sedentary lifestyle.

But just as too much body fat will leave you vulnerable, losing that weight is one of the quickest ways to reduce your chances of gout attacks (especially if you are a man between the ages of 20 and 40). Exercise is a very important part of the weight-loss equation.

Mobile Joints Recover Faster

Regular exercise keeps muscles limber, bones strong, and joints mobile. A body with a strong foundation will function more fluidly, and can recover from injury much more quickly and completely than a weak body.

This is important information if you live with gout: taking the time to build up your body strength, metabolism, and natural immunity will not only help you ward off gout attacks, but if you are sidelined by the pain and swelling of uric acid crystals, you are more likely to recover your strength and mobility quickly once the attack passes.

Exercise Won't Get Rid of Uric Acid Crystals

It may seem like the right joint movement should be able to break up those troublesome uric acid crystals, but that

is not the case.

These crystals are microscopic — about as long as a white blood cell — so outside force does little to dissolve them. Instead, your body's metabolic processes are responsible for their formation, movement, and breakdown.

Since your uric acid levels depend on a complex system of diet, metabolism, and genetic factors, you will need to couple your regular exercise with a gout-friendly menu plan and good self-care. Whenever you feel like your gout is getting out of your control, it is time to consult with your doctor.

Should You Rest or Work Out?

Those prone to gout will need to listen to their bodies closely when it comes to exercise. While regular exercise is a key to better health and fewer flare-ups, certain circumstances can call for a gentler approach.

Watch for Inflammation

In general, inflammation is the deciding factor: if a joint is already inflamed, strenuous movement can make things much worse. Look out for swelling, redness, warmth, and stiffness; when these symptoms are present, it is important to rest the joint and treat the inflammation with cold therapy or medication.

Build Gradually

If your muscles feel a bit stiff, but your joints do not show signs of inflammation, feel free to work out. Stiff joints can benefit from some mild range of motion exercises before you jump into more activity, and be sure to gradually increase your level of exertion — especially when you are recovering from a gout attack.

Best Exercises for Gout Sufferers

Exercise is a pretty broad term — a workout could consist of everything from stretching to sprinting. Not everyone will be able to sustain a high level of exertion, nor should they.

When your joints are already prone to problems, and certain areas are particularly vulnerable, you will need to tailor a standard workout plan to suit your body.

Physical activity should begin with stretching. During the first day or so, it might be a good idea to limit the routine to stretching and range of motion.

Best Exercises for Gout Sufferers

How to Stretch While Suffering From Gout

- **If there is no gout flare-up in your feet, stand with feet flat on the floor, about 10 inches apart.** Let one arm fall limp to one side and reach to the sky with the other, stretch the arm over the head and bend to the side. Straighten and reach to the sky with both arms. Bend over toward the floor and drop arms as low as they will drop without straining. Reach to the side with the other arm. Arch back backwards so your arms drop behind the body and bend backwards slightly. Let hands drop and roll shoulders forward for 30 seconds and backwards for 30 seconds.
- **Because it is very difficult to get up from the floor with gout or obesity, do hamstring stretches on stairs or a low stool.** Stand facing the stairs with one foot against them, touching the stairs with your big toe. With your opposite arm reaching over your head, try to touch your toes of the foot on the stairs. Try three times and repeat with your other leg and arm.

Afterwards, follow with a rotation activity:

- **Make a fist and roll your wrist clockwise and counter-clockwise for 30 seconds each direction.**

Repeat with the other wrist.

- **Sit straight on chair and look to the side.** Slowly move your head down so your chin touches your chest, then slowly move your head from side to side. Rotate your neck back up slowly until it's facing the sky.
- **Sitting on a chair, hold one leg up and rotate your ankle clockwise and counter-clockwise for 30 seconds in each direction.** Repeat with your other leg.

Fitness is relative and gout sufferers have many limits that must be respected. For some, limiting to stretching and rotations may be good enough for a few days. If exercise is limited to stretching and rotation, it should be repeated several times per day. Soon, mobility will increase and a more effective exercise routine will be possible.

Good fitness routines for those trying to move more while suffering from gout or obesity are low-impact cardiovascular exercises such as walking, stair climbing or mild dance exercise. It is recommended to start with 10 minutes every day, but some benefit from starting with as few as two to four minutes and working up to the 10 minutes. Starting slow will permit an ultimate goal of 30 minutes of fitness daily.

Moderate Cardio

Aerobic exercise is at the center of every exercise plan. This is what will help you burn calories, strengthen your heart, keep your joints mobile, and metabolize acid in the bloodstream, all at the same time.

But how hard do you have to huff and puff before you improve your gout? Not as hard as you might think.

Low-impact exercise is a good plan to start, especially if you are new to working out, or you are prone to gout attacks. Walking and biking are good ways to get your heart rate up without taxing your bones too much, but if you are really worried about joint pressure, opt for a few laps in the pool: swimming provides the resistance you need without the hard impact that can hurt.

Resistance Band Strengthening

Strength training should factor into every workout routine, since it will build your muscle and rev up your metabolism for lasting positive results.

However, free weights are not for everyone, and using machines can be tricky, even downright dangerous, if you’re not familiar with them. Making use of your own bodyweight (and a couple of simple tools) is a great alternative.

Resistance bands are thick, flat, stretchy belts that can be held, wrapped or secured to provide some resistance to a simple movement. For instance, standing in the middle of the band and pulling each end up with your hands can be an easy way to work out your arm muscles.

There’s a huge variety of bands out there, and just as many ways to use them, so take the time to speak with a trainer or fitness expert before you begin. Good form is vital if you want to target the proper muscles and void injury, so do not skip out on helpful instruction.

Focus on Frequency, Not Distance

When you are beginning to see results and enjoying all the extra energy, it is natural to want to push yourself towards a goal. Motivation is wonderful, and you should definitely keeping aiming higher, but be careful what you focus on.

Running a marathon will not get rid of your gout for good, but when you stick with a regular exercise plan — like a 30-minute stretch of cardio, three to four days a week — results will begin to add up, and you might just see your gout fade into the background.

Exercising While in a Gout Attack

Continuing your exercise routine while in the middle of painful gout attack could lead to greater discomfort, and it is recommended that you switch to a different exercise that takes the pressure and focus off of the affected body part. If you do experience a gout attack while exercising, it is important to follow these steps:

- Take all pressure off of the affect area and try to raise it if possible.
- Avoid touching or knocking into the affected area.
- Apply ice or cold water for a length of about 20 minutes to the area to lessen the pain.

Exercise Other Body Parts

A critical thing for a person with gout to learn is how to exercise different parts of your body when you are experiencing a gout attack. If gout is affecting a joint in your foot, try exercising your arms that day, and then switch once the gout attack has passed.

It is a bad idea to try and exercise the part of your body that gout alters, because placing pressure on the affected part of the body could result in immense pain.

Use Workout Machines

Gout pain should not deter you from exercising, especially if you are trying to control your weight, which is done in an attempt to control your gout. Try using workout machines, which help to target only a specific section of your body.

Do this so you are able to stay on track with your workout routine, and do not have to suffer while experiencing a gout attack.

Understand Your Limitations

After the worst of the attack seems to have past, it is important to understanding your limitations when it comes to working out the affected area. Do not set your goals too high when exercising with gout.

Rather, understand that you might not be able to reach the level of ability you reached previously during this attack. Allowing for the gout attack to happen and fully pass before working out that section of your body is important. Your body needs time to heal and recuperate in order to maintain the level of efficiency that you require of it.

Lifestyle Changes

While exercising with gout is not impossible, it might be a challenge even for the healthiest of individuals. This is why it is recommended to try and control your gout so attacks are less frequent.

Some ways to control gout is by changing your lifestyle to reduce the amount of uric acid in your body or trying medication that will lower your uric acid levels. Some lifestyle changes that are effective in preventing gout are:

- Getting regular exercise
- Eating a healthy diet
- Drinking plenty of water
- Avoiding foods that are rich in purines, such as turkey and anchovies.
- Managing your weight, because overweight individuals often experience higher levels of uric acid in their blood, when compared to individuals with healthy BMI.