Causes, Symptoms and Effective Treatments for Juvenile Gout

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Juvenile Gout

Gout attacks generally occur in adults, but children are not immune to the uric acid buildup that leads to this inflammatory condition. As is the case with adult patients, children who suffer from gout often experience severe pain and swelling in the joints of the wrists, ankles, knees and big toes that can last from a couple of days to over a week.

Gout can be a chronic illness, especially when the cause is unknown. In children, genetics often play a big role, but fortunately, treatment for the underlying condition will likely eradicate the gout, too.

Causes of Gout in Children

Most cases of gout in children that appear before puberty can be traced to a genetic cause, such as kidney disease, but it is possible for children to increase their risk of gout later through the lifestyle choices they make now. Common risk factors for gout in younger people are both biological and environmental:

- **Diet high in purines**. A diet high in purine-rich foods like meat, beans, mushroom and seafood can elevate uric acid levels in the blood, and that can pave the way for a gout attack later in adolescence.
- **Genetic disposition**. Everyone has an enzyme (known as HPRT) in their body that helps to process purines in food, protecting against uric acid crystal buildup. A prevalence of gout in the family suggests a deficiency of this enzyme, and that deficiency will continue to pass through generations.
- **Male gender**. Men tend to suffer from gout more often than women, with most cases affecting males between the ages of 13 and 75.
- **Metabolic syndrome**. High blood pressure and obesity can lead to gout, and while these factors are usually seen in adults, more children are showing signs of metabolic syndrome in recent years.

Male children who are genetically predisposed to gout should be extra careful when it comes to their food choices, since a high-purine, low-fiber diet could bring on a gout attack as early as puberty. Water, exercise and wholesome plant-based foods are important measures to protect against the pain and disability that gout can bring.

Treating Juvenile Gout

Managing gout symptoms can be as simple as making smart lifestyle choices, or more involved if a kidney problem is to blame. The first step in either case is to find a way to safely and quickly diminish the discomfort, while you learn more about what factors could be contributing to your unique case:

- **NSAIDs for symptom relief**. Ibuprofen and naproxen are ideal anti-inflammatory medications.
- **Cut out sugar**. Eliminating refined sugars (candy, soda) and reducing natural sugars (juice, fruit) can help to stifle the symptoms and ward off future attacks.

- **Use heat and cold therapy**. Alternating between heat and cold can reduce the pain and swelling,
- **Add anti-inflammatory foods**. Cherries, cereals, nuts, vegetables and rice all have a place in a diet for those prone to gout attacks.
- **Find the genetic cause**. Since gout doesn't normally occur in young children, the symptoms could point to another condition. Consult a doctor about your child's kidney health, and have them refer you to a specialist, if needed.

If the cause is found to be a serious kidney problem, treatment will naturally be different. Research into juvenile gout is ongoing, and it has so far uncovered a number of gene mutations that lead to kidney disease in adolescence, encouraging acute conditions like gout, that can become more serious in adulthood. Luckily, there are treatments available, and the earlier the issue is caught, the less damage will occur in the tissues and joints.