Know Your Risk of Heart Disease and How to Lower It

by ANGELA FINLAY

Gout and Heart Disease

Scientists at the University of Oxford have conducted an important study on gout and cardiovascular health over the past five decades, and the recent results on the relationship between gout and heart disease are clear: patients with gout have twice the risk of suffering a heart attack or stroke. Other studies conducted in the United States and Europe have returned similar findings, which means it has become more important than ever to consider just how the pain and inflammation of gout can interfere with general health.

Gout Symptoms and Cardiovascular Health

Gout is an arthritic condition that affects the joints, while cardiovascular disease is typically thought to rest on aspects like circulation and heart function. It's no surprise, then, that these two conditions have been treated as separate afflictions up until recently, when research began to suggest two important links between gout and heart attack risk that should not be ignored:

Excess uric acid affects the cardiovascular system. High uric acid levels can have far-reaching consequences. Although the precise interaction is not completely clear, recent research suggests that a high level of uric acid in your blood directly impacts your chances of experiencing a cardiac event, perhaps due to the increased level and frequency of inflammation in the joints.

Gout risk factors are heart disease risk factors. Although there is a clear link, experts point out that it can be difficult to know if uric acid should take all the blame for diminishing heart health. After all, other factors are usually at play when it comes to gout, like poor diet, hypertension, body mass index, and diuretic use, all of which are known to negatively impact the cardiovascular system.

In the end, it's important to recognize that uric acid – along with the web of lifestyle factors and medication in most gout cases – must be tracked and managed more closely in order to avoid serious consequences.

Treating Gout while Protecting the Heart

Now that the medical community better understands the relationship between gout and heart disease, gout can no longer be considered a localized, inflammatory condition. The good news is, more gout patients are likely to receive more thorough treatment before the condition begins to seriously endanger the heart. On the other hand, these new findings can also mean that traditional gout treatment may need to change.

- **Medication**. When gout was seen as a fairly straightforward inflammatory pain disorder, it was natural to treat flare-ups with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), but these have been linked to an increased risk of heart attack in some people. Luckily, there are some other options that can relieve gout symptoms without putting too much stress on the heart, blood pressure or kidney function, such as uric-acid lowering drugs that target the root cause – too much uric acid – instead of treating the acute

symptoms of an attack.

- **Lifestyle factors**. Building a better diet and exercise routine is crucial for a healthier heart, but knowing your triggers for gout attacks (and avoiding them) is another important step in the right direction. Since uric acid seems to be an independent risk factor for heart disease, monitoring and limiting your uric acid levels as much as possible should help to lower your risk of heart problems.

While recent studies haven't offered a perfect solution for gout and heart health, they do point to the need for a more focused, holistic approach to gout treatment. If you suffer from gout, talk to your doctor about your other risk factors for heart disease, and what will be the best way forward to a healthier, longer life.