The Relationship Between Sugar and Gout

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What You Need to Know About Sugar and Gout

Refined sugars aren't particularly good for anybody, but they can be downright dangerous when combined with certain conditions. Gout is one such example: those who enjoy a diet high in sugar and alcohol are at a far greater risk of developing the painful swelling and inflammation that comes with uric acid buildup.

The fact that gout is associated with diabetes and metabolic syndrome – two conditions sprung from a regular overload of sugar – strengthens the theory that sugar and gout go hand-in-hand.

Is Sugar Bad for Gout?

A recent study out of the Boston University School of Medicine found that, regardless of other diet and lifestyle factors, sugar intake had a significant impact on the severity and frequency of gout attacks. Men who drank six soft drinks a week had a 29 percent higher chance of developing gout, and for those that drank two or more soft drinks each day, their risk was 85 percent higher.

While all sugar can be detrimental, fructose is at the root of the problem. Fructose is a gout hazard because it increases the production of uric acid, and so it has the same effect on the body as purine-rich foods that you've been taught to avoid.

However, perhaps more importantly, fructose also reduces excretion of uric acid. This makes fructose a double threat: not only will it raise the level of uric acid in your blood, but it will also prevent your kidneys from getting rid of the uric acid that your body naturally produces, which means a major buildup that will likely lead uric acid crystals lodging in your joints.

How to Limit Sugar and Gout Attacks

Although purines do contribute to gout attacks, it's quite likely that the combination of purine-rich foods and high-sugar foods are the biggest threat. After all, many people who focus their menu on hearty meats and greasy protein also tend to enjoy sugary treats and beverages (the essence of the unhealthy American diet).

So, instead of reorganizing your entire meal plan, begin by cutting back on sugar to restore your body's natural filtering system, and help your metabolism tackle the rest of the food on your plate.

Cutting out sugar is a daunting prospect, but a few small changes can make a huge difference in your sugar intake:

Watch Out for Hidden Sources

Fructose is practically everywhere, and it's easy to take in more than you think. Packaged foods are the biggest

problem, so a good first step is to swap out processed meals and snacks for whole foods.

When you do buy packaged food, read the fine print: sugar comes in many forms and goes by lots of names (for example, sucralose contains fructose), so do your research before you hit the grocery aisles.

Stop Drinking

Alcohol behaves a lot like sugar once it enters your body: it both increases the production of uric acid and interferes with your body's ability to excrete it. It's no surprise that beer is one of the major culprits behind gout attacks since it not only contains alcohol but is high in simple carbohydrates that will wreak havoc on your metabolism.

Substitute Vegetables for Fruit

Most fruits are high in fructose, so even though they're natural, they can still feed your gout. It may not seem like a fair trade-off at first, but there are plenty of veggies that have the crunch and sweetness you crave.

Carrots, beets and green peas are all loaded with vitamins, incredibly versatile, and refreshingly sweet. While they do have some sugar, their high fiber, nutrient-dense qualities more than make up for the touch of fructose.

Considering Eating a Paleo Diet

If you work better with structure, you may want to adopt a clear and concise menu that takes the guesswork out of meals.

Research shows that purines trigger uric acid production, but unlike fructose, they won't interfere with your body's ability to excrete the excess. In turn, a diet that focuses on limiting natural and refined sugars rather than proteins may be a good step for you.

The Paleo diet focuses on animal proteins, vegetables and fruits, while shunning more modern-day luxuries like grains, sugars and alcohol. It's certainly not the best way to cut out purines from your diet (they're found in all kinds of meat), but it can drastically limit the amount of harmful sugars you take in.

Of course, it's vital that you discuss the pros and cons with your doctor before deciding on the Paleo diet, or any other specific diet plan, for that matter.

Look Forward, Not Back

Give your taste buds time to adjust. Sugar is a big part of the modern American diet, and your body has become used to the taste, feeling, and consequences of a sugary snack.

It can be difficult to adapt to your new healthier diet, but if you stick with it, soon you'll notice the natural sweetness in certain foods, and you'll be able to satisfy your sweet tooth while you boost your health with wholesome ingredients.

Attitude and commitment are important parts of any healthy lifestyle change. Stay focused on your goal, appreciate every small gain you make, and keep your health and wellbeing firmly at the top of your priority list.

Realize that sugar is a drug, and cutting it out won't be a walk in the park, but your life will be a lot more comfortable and fulfilling once you reduce your gout risk by limiting your sugar intake.