How Dehydration Interferes with Gout Management

by ANGELA FINLAY

Gout and Dehydration

Living with gout is no picnic, but there are certain things that can turn it into an ongoing nightmare. Purine-rich foods, alcohol, and sugar are all known to send your uric acid levels through the roof, but they're not the only culprits when it comes to painful inflammation in the joints. In fact, one major cause of gout attacks is also one that is very easily overlooked.

Many people don't get enough water each day to stay properly hydrated, but when you are prone to uric acid buildup, that oversight can bring a lot of trouble. Gout and dehydration don't mix; research has shown that dehydration can set off a range of effects in the blood and tissues that can make your gout unnecessarily difficult to manage.

Why Dehydration is Dangerous

It's no secret that water is necessary for a healthy, well-functioning body, but hitting the recommended 8 glasses a day could be especially important for gout sufferers.

Water is a joint lubricant, which is certainly helpful when your joints are prone to collecting uric acid crystals. But the benefits of water don't stop at the joints – a hydrated body simply functions better, and can filter impurities much more efficiently. In gout patients, good hydration is necessary to manage:

- **Uric acid levels**. Gout attacks can generally be blamed on a build-up of uric acid in the blood, which then forms crystals, and dehydration can increase the concentration of uric acid in your body. Water will dilute the uric acid levels quickly.
- **Kidney function**. Without adequate water, the kidneys will get irritated more easily and have to work harder to filter impurities. In turn, they cannot efficiently clear uric acid from the body, which means there's more time for it to form crystals that lodge in the joints.
- **Weight gain**. Dehydration can cause you to gain weight by slowing your metabolism, affecting the way your body uses fits at stores, and actually leading you to consume more calories. Experts warn that carrying excess weight is one of the best ways to bring on regular gout attacks.

A recent internet-based study out of the Boston University School of Medicine found that each glass of water patients consume in a 24 hour period has a direct impact on their chances of experiencing a painful gout attack. Of the 535 people who participated in the study, those who drank 5 to 8 glasses each day were 40% less likely to have a gout attack than those who stuck with one glass of water or less.

Easy, Comfortable and Efficient Ways to Stay Hydrated

Drinking more fresh, clean water is an obvious solution, but not everyone can (or wants to) drink buckets of water all day long. If you find it difficult to take in water alone, you can add some variety to your hydration with a few

clever approaches:

- **Increase your veggies**. A lot of fruit is high in water, but it's also generally high in sugar, which may not align with your gout management diet. Instead, concentrate on lots of crisp, fresh veggies: celery, cucumber, carrots, beets, bell peppers, lettuce, and tomatoes are all full of water (but many other crunchy veggies are fair game, too).
  Soup is an easy and healthy way to up your water intake. Branch out from traditional chicken noodle, and try a hearty root vegetable stew, minestrone, or sweet and spicy Thai. If you're looking for a healthy dessert, turn to apples: they contain malic acid, which is believed to neutralize the uric acid in your body.
- **Try herbal tea**. There are hundreds of tea blends that are packed with flavor and healthy minerals, and many people find it much easier to load up on a pot of this herbal infusion instead of a jug of water. Ginger tea is exceptionally good for gout, since ginger root has been proven to relieve gout symptoms.
  Most teas are beneficial, as long as they are caffeine-free. After all, caffeine is a diuretic, which means it encourages your body to expel more water, and that's not what you need. However, green tea, although caffeinated, is thought to be good for gout when consumed in moderation, considering it is low in purines and high in inflammation-fighting antioxidants.

- **Naturally flavored water**. Commercial sports drinks, vitamin water and other "heathy" hydrators are not as good for your body as their marketing teams would have you believe. Luckily, there are simple ways to spruce up your own water. Try fruit infusions, where you add a few slices of a sweet fruit to a jug of cold water, or get inventive and create some flavor combinations. Cucumbers lend a clean, mellow flavor, and citrus is notoriously refreshing. A cube of ginger, a sprig of rosemary, or a muddled bunch of mint can bring tap water to new heights.

When More Water is Not the Answer

Hydration is a powerful tool to beat gout flares, but there are times when too much water will make things worse. Kidney disease or impairment can prevent your body from eliminating waste water, and poor heart function can interfere with fluid elimination, as well. People who are overweight or very sedentary might also experience fluid retention in the legs (due to stress on the vascular system), which can complicate your hydration routine.

If you notice swelling in your legs or ankles, or have been diagnosed with kidney or heart trouble, consult your doctor before overhauling your hydration routine. In some cases, a diuretic can actually help get your fluid balance back to normal, and then you can begin to increase the amount of water you take in daily.