



Out with Gout

How to live
a healthy life
with gout



Handy gout guide

Stick it to your fridge or keep it with
your medicines as a reminder.

- ### How to prevent gout attacks
- ✓ Keep to a healthy weight.
 - ✓ Eat three meals each day.
 - ✓ Choose small servings of meat and seafood.
 - ✓ Enjoy low-fat dairy foods each day.
 - ✓ Drink less alcohol.
 - ✓ Drink plenty of water.
 - ✓ Take gout medicine every day, if your doctor has prescribed it.

Out with Gout

How to treat gout attacks

- ✓ Go to your doctor for some pain-relieving medicine as soon as you can.
- ✓ Protect the part of your body that hurts.
- ✓ Rest, put an ice pack on the sore joint, and raise it.
- ✓ Keep taking gout medicine every day.
- ✓ See your doctor again if you don't get any better after 24 hours.

This book is based on one written by Dr Peter Gow, Rheumatologist, Middlemore Hospital, in conjunction with Dr Hemi Williams, Ian Mete, and Bernard Gadd.

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PHARMAC

PO Box 10-254

Wellington

Free Phone: 0800 66 00 50

Website: www.pharmac.govt.nz

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What does this book tell you?

This book is for people who have gout and their whānau/family. It explains the things that you and your whānau/family can do to prevent and treat gout.

Following the advice in this book will help you to get on top of gout so that:

- the pain of gout goes away
- if you get gout attacks they won't be as painful
- damage to your joints and kidneys stops
- gout won't get in the way of you working, being active, or enjoying your favourite foods.

Your doctor will help you to make a plan to manage your gout well. Go back to the doctor for regular check-ups to talk about how your gout plan is working.

You might find it helpful to write down what you talk about with the doctor so that you and your whānau/family know what to do. Ask your doctor or nurse to explain anything you are not sure about.

Talk with your whānau/family about how they can support you to get enough exercise and eat foods that will help to prevent gout. Encourage them to get treatment if they have signs of gout because it may run in your family.

The most important things to remember are:

Gout can damage your joints and your kidneys if it is not treated.

Watching what you eat and drink will help to prevent gout from causing you pain and damage to your joints and kidneys.

If you are prescribed a medicine to prevent gout attacks, you must take it every day.

Make sure that you and your whānau/family know what to do if you have a gout attack.

What is gout?

Gout causes sudden attacks of pain in some joints. It is a type of arthritis.

Gout can affect any joint but the first attack usually affects the big toe or another part of the foot. The joint becomes painful and swollen. The skin over the joint can become red and shiny.

A gout attack usually lasts 7–10 days if it is not treated.

If gout is not treated:

- attacks will happen again and more joints will be affected
- lumps can grow on the elbows, hands and feet, the lumps can become sore and swollen, and they may cause skin ulcers
- the natural padding between the bones will start to wear away and the joints will become sore and stiff
- kidney stones can form and cause pain and damage to your kidneys.

Gout can damage your joints and your kidneys if it is not treated.

By working together, you, your whānau/family, and your doctor can beat gout.



A lump caused by gout



A skin ulcer caused by a gouty lump

Why does gout happen?

Gout happens when there is too much of a chemical called uric acid in your blood.

It is normal for the body to make uric acid when you eat certain foods. Usually most of the uric acid passes out of your body in your urine.

Uric acid may build up in your blood if you take certain medicines, eat certain foods, or have kidney problems.

If there is too much uric acid in your blood, the uric acid turns into crystals. The crystals are sharp and needle-shaped, like tiny pieces of glass.

Crystals in the joints cause the pain and swelling of a gout attack and can damage the natural padding between the bones.

Crystals under the skin cause gouty lumps.

Crystals in the kidneys cause kidney stones and kidney damage.



Why do some people get gout?

Gout usually has more than one cause.

Many people inherit gout from their parents or grandparents. Gout may be passed down in the genes.

Having kidney problems can cause gout. If your kidneys are damaged, they are less able to get rid of uric acid from your body.

What you eat and drink is important. Eating lots of meat and shellfish, drinking too much alcohol (especially beer), and being overweight can cause gout.

Some medicines can cause gout. For example, diuretics (also called water pills or fluid tablets), which are used to treat high blood pressure and heart problems, can cause gout.

Whatever the cause, gout can be treated.



How to prevent gout attacks

There are two ways you can prevent gout attacks.

- **Watch what you eat and drink**
Following a few food tips can help you to avoid gout attacks.
- **Take medicines every day**
Most people with gout are prescribed a medicine to help prevent gout attacks.



Following these tips will lower the level of uric acid in your blood, which will help you to avoid gout attacks.

1 Keep to a healthy weight

If you are overweight, losing weight is the most effective treatment for gout. If you are not overweight, try to keep to your healthy weight. Being overweight increases the amount of uric acid in your blood.

Every little bit of weight you lose will help avoid gout attacks.

2 Eat three meals each day

Spread your eating evenly through the day. Starving or feasting can bring on an attack of gout.

3 Choose small servings of meat, chicken, and seafood

Enjoy no more than two small servings of meat, chicken, or seafood each day. Each serving can be the size of the palm of your hand.

Meat, chicken, and seafood can cause gout attacks because they contain lots of protein. When you digest protein your body produces uric acid.

Try beans, peas, lentils, and tofu instead of meat. Beans, peas, lentils, and tofu contain less protein than meat and seafood.

Eating and drinking to prevent gout attacks



4 Enjoy low-fat dairy foods every day

Having two servings of low-fat dairy foods every day can help protect you against gout.

One serving is one glass of trim milk or one pottle of yoghurt or two slices of low fat cheese or one-third of a cup of cottage cheese.

5 Drink less alcohol

Avoid alcohol if you are having a gout attack.

When you feel well, have no more than two standard drinks each day.

Try to avoid beer because it is more likely to cause gout attacks than other types of alcohol.

One standard drink is 100 ml wine (half a small wine glass) or 30 ml spirit (one nip).

6 Drink plenty of water

Try to have 6–8 cups of water or other non-alcoholic drinks every day. If you have kidney stones you should drink more.

Avoid sugary drinks because they can cause you to put on weight and can also cause gout attacks.



You may find that there are certain foods that trigger a gout attack for you. Some people find that just drinking one can of beer gives them a gout attack. This is different for everyone. Take note of the foods that cause you to have an attack so you can avoid them or eat less of them.



Medicines to prevent gout attacks



There are two medicines you can take to prevent gout attacks. They are called allopurinol and probenecid. They prevent gout attacks by lowering the level of uric acid in your blood.

When you have started taking one of these medicines you should keep taking it every day, even when you feel well. If you stop taking your medicine, you may have a gout attack.

Your doctor may give you a pain-reliever to take for the first few months that you are taking allopurinol or probenecid. This is because these medicines can sometimes cause gout attacks when you first start taking them.

Allopurinol (pronounced al-oh-pure-in-ole)

Probenecid (pronounced pro-ben-i-sid)

Who it is for

People who have more than one gout attack each year or who have gouty lumps or kidney stones usually take allopurinol.

People who cannot take allopurinol because of side effects usually take probenecid instead.

Some people take probenecid and allopurinol together to help control their gout.

What to be careful of

See your doctor immediately if you get a skin rash while you are taking allopurinol.

Two in every 100 people who take allopurinol will have a skin rash. The rash is usually mild but a small number of people have a serious skin rash.

It is very important to drink at least 6–8 cups of water, juice, or milk every day if you are taking probenecid.

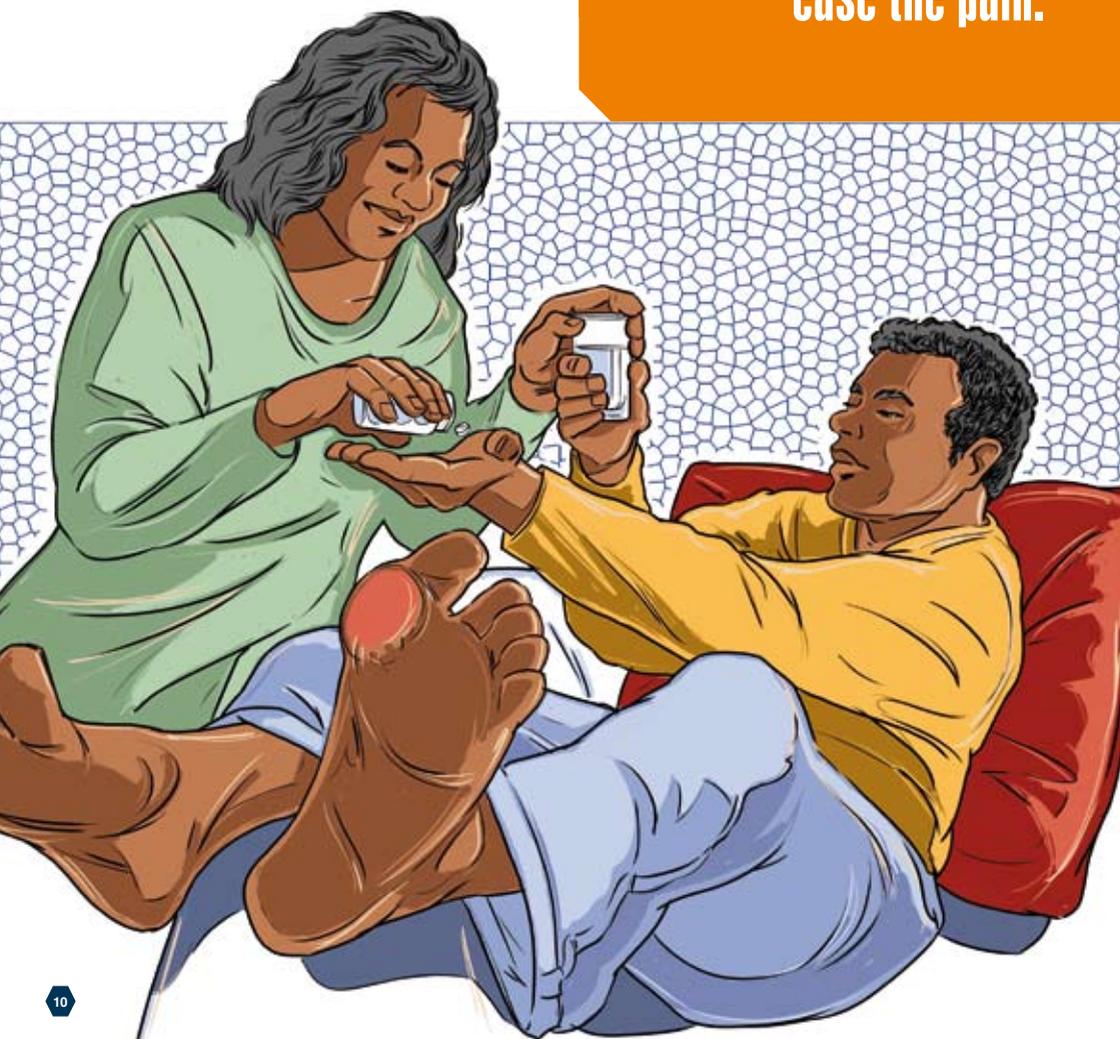
Probenecid can cause stones to form in your kidneys if you do not drink enough fluid.

This table describes some of the most important side effects of allopurinol and probenecid. It is not a complete list of all of the side effects of these medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you would like more information about the side effects of allopurinol or probenecid.

Make sure that you and your whānau/family know what to do if you have a gout attack.

What to do

Follow these steps to ease the pain.



if you have a gout attack

Go to your doctor for some pain-relieving medicine as soon as you can

Medicines that you can buy from the pharmacy without a prescription, like aspirin or paracetamol, are not usually strong enough to relieve the pain of a gout attack.

Do not take medicine prescribed for someone else because it could be dangerous for you. A medicine prescribed for someone else may not be the most suitable one for you.

Protect the part of your body that hurts

Sit where people won't bump into you.

Put a chair beside the bed to hold up the sheets and blankets so that they don't press on the painful joint.

If your foot is affected, wear shoes or slippers that don't hurt it.

Rest, put an ice pack on the painful joint, and keep it raised

Keep taking your allopurinol or probenecid

See your doctor again if you don't get any better after 24 hours

Medicines to treat gout attacks

Medicines can be used to help relieve the pain of a gout attack. These medicines will not prevent joint damage, gouty lumps or skin ulcers.

There are three main types of medicine used to treat gout attacks. They are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, corticosteroids, and colchicine.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) (pronounced en-seeds)

NSAIDs should only be used for short periods of time, such as a few days or weeks. This is because they can cause side effects such as indigestion, stomach ulcers, skin rash, and kidney and heart problems.

The most common NSAIDs used for gout are diclofenac and naproxen.

Stop taking colchicine immediately if you have stomach pain, diarrhoea, nausea, or vomiting.

Corticosteroids (pronounced core-tick-o-stare-oids)

Corticosteroids are also called steroids. They are not the same as the steroids that some sportspeople use to build up their muscles.

Corticosteroids can be taken as tablets or an injection.

If you have diabetes, taking corticosteroid tablets can make your diabetes more difficult to control. Talk to your doctor about what you need to do to control your diabetes while you are taking corticosteroid tablets.

The most common corticosteroids used for gout are prednisone, methylprednisolone, and triamcinolone.

Colchicine (pronounced col-che-seen)

Colchicine is usually only used if an NSAID or a corticosteroid is not suitable for you.

It is very important to follow your doctor's advice about the correct dose of colchicine. Taking too much colchicine can cause serious side effects.

Each tablet contains 0.5 milligrams (mg) of colchicine. Do not take more than five tablets in the first 24 hours of a gout attack, or more than 12 tablets in four days. If you have kidney or liver problems or you are elderly you should have a lower dose than this. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you are not sure how many tablets to take.

Stop taking colchicine immediately if you have stomach pain, diarrhoea, nausea, or vomiting. See your doctor if stomach pain, diarrhoea, nausea, or vomiting continues after you have stopped taking colchicine.

Checking your uric acid level

Your doctor can check the level of uric acid in your blood by taking a blood sample. It is good to have your uric acid level checked at least once a year.

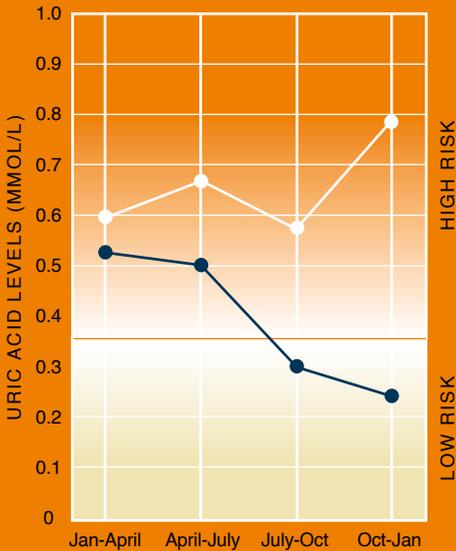
Ask your doctor or nurse what your uric acid level is. If you keep a record of your uric acid level, you can see if changing your lifestyle and taking medicines are controlling your gout.

Try to keep your uric acid level below 0.36 millimoles per litre (mmol/L).

This will help to prevent gout attacks, joint damage and kidney stones and will make your gouty lumps smaller.

To keep your uric acid level below 0.36 you will need to take your medicine (allopurinol or probenecid) every day and follow the food tips on pages 6 and 7.

This graph shows how uric acid levels might change over time in people with gout.



The white line shows the uric acid level of a man with gout who is not taking gout medication regularly or eating and drinking the right foods to manage his gout. His uric acid level keeps going up, putting him in danger of more gout attacks, gouty lumps, kidney problems, and joint damage.

The black line shows the uric acid level of a man who is taking allopurinol every day and who eats and drinks wisely. His uric acid level has dropped to below 0.36 and now he is much less likely to have gout attacks.



Tips for using gout medicines

Here are a few things you can do to make the most of your medicines.

Know the names of your medicines

Most medicines have two names. One is the name of the active ingredient and the other is the brand name. Make sure you know at least one of the names of each of your medicines. See the list on page 15.

Know how to take your medicines

Make sure you know how much to take, how often to take it, and when to stop taking your medicine.

Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you are taking

Some medicines can make gout worse. Mixing some medicines can cause side effects. Tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you are taking, including medicines from your traditional healer, the pharmacy, and the supermarket.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about side effects

All medicines can have side effects. Ask your doctor or pharmacist what the common side effects of your medicines are. Tell your doctor if you think you might be having a side effect.

Don't share medicines

Taking medicines prescribed for someone else might be dangerous for you. A medicine prescribed for someone else might not be the most suitable one for you.

Keep medicines out of reach of children

Even small doses of adult medicine can be dangerous for children.

Names of common gout medicines

Type of medicine	Active ingredient name	Brand names
Medicines to prevent gout attacks	allopurinol	Allohexal, Allorin, Apo-Allopurinol, Progout
	probenecid	Probenecid
Medicines to relieve the pain of gout attacks	colchicine	Colgout
	naproxen	Noflam, Naprogesic, Naprosyn, Naxen, Noflam, Sonaflam, Synflex, Apo-Naproxen
	diclofenac	Voltaren, Apo-Diclo, Cataflam, Diclax, Flameril, Diclohexal
	ibuprofen	Nurofen, I-Profen, Brufen, Ibucare, Apo-Ibuprofen
	methylprednisolone	Medrol (tablet), Depo-Medrol (injection)
	triamcinolone	Kenacort (injection)

The information in this table was up to date in February 2008. There may have been additions to or deletions from this table since then. Your pharmacist can tell you more about which brands are available and how much they cost.

Where to find more information

Arthritis NZ (www.arthritis.org.nz)

This website gives more information about types of arthritis and treatments.

Best Treatments (www.besttreatments.co.uk)

This is a website from the United Kingdom that gives reliable information about which treatments work for many different conditions. It contains detailed information about treatments for gout.