

# 10 MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT GOUT



## 1. If left untreated, gout will always go away on its own.

*Myth.* The symptoms of a gout attack may go away within a few days, but without treatment, the primary risk factor (hyperuricemia) may still be present and symptoms may become more frequent. Potential long-term effects of gout can include joint damage and deformity in some instances.

## 2. Gout is a very rare condition.

*Myth.* An estimated 5.1 million people live with gout, according to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey III, 1988-1994. It is the most common form of inflammatory arthritis in men over the age of 40.

## 3. Gout is one of the most painful medical conditions.

*Fact.* Gout has been compared to the pain of childbirth and bone fractures.

## 4. Gout is related to a buildup of uric acid in the bloodstream.

*Fact.* The leading risk factor for gout is a buildup of uric acid in the bloodstream, a condition known as hyperuricemia.

## 5. Other than when I'm having a flare, my gout is under control.

*Myth.* It may be tempting to forget about gout when you're not having a painful attack. But you may have hyperuricemia—the primary risk factor for gout—even when you are not having an attack. Also, significant joint damage can occur in the period between attacks, not only during an attack.

## 6. The long-term effects of gout can be controlled by reducing the level of uric acid in the bloodstream.

*Fact.* The treatment of gout involves managing hyperuricemia. Lowering uric acid levels may help reduce the risk of future attacks over time as well as protect against the development of tophi (chalky deposits of uric acid crystals around joints) which may cause long-term damage and disability in affected joints.

## 7. My gout is only caused by overindulgence in food and drink.

*Myth.* Overeating, drinking alcohol, or eating a purine-rich diet can contribute to a buildup of uric acid in the bloodstream; however, there are many other potential risk factors for gout that are not associated with diet.

**8. If you're overweight, a good way to manage gout is to go on a crash diet.**

Myth. Diets designed for quick or extreme weight loss may increase uric acid levels in the blood. Exercise and a healthy, balanced diet may allow you to lose weight gradually. Talk to your healthcare provider about the best plan for you to lose weight.

**9. Gout usually affects the large joint in the big toe.**

Fact. About 90% of people with gout have reported at least one flare-up in their big toe. But people with gout can also experience symptoms in other joints, including the hands, elbows, and knees.

**10. My risk of an attack goes up and down with the specific level of uric acid in my blood.**

Fact. A high uric acid level (hyperuricemia) is the primary risk factor for gout, and the higher the level of uric acid in your blood, the more likely you are to have a painful attack.