

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Gout, Diet and What To Eat”

Millions of Americans are diagnosed with a painful form of arthritis commonly known as gout, which is likely tied to the national obesity epidemic. Rising rates of both obesity and high blood pressure appear to account for most of the increase in gout. In a recent study, more than 21 percent of men and women had high uric acid levels, versus only 3 percent in the 1988-94 surveys. So, what can we do to curtail the ever-increasing risk of being a victim of gout? Studies have shown that consuming certain types of food can bring on a gout attack. Substances known as purines are present in foods, which can be turned into uric acid in the body. Foods high in purines increase the risk of a person developing gout. Certain food and drink, such as alcohol and red meat, can trigger a gout attack. With too much uric acid, crystals can form in the joints, causing severe pain, tenderness, redness, and inflammation. Gout most commonly affects men, but also women who have been through menopause. A gout "attack" can come on suddenly. Attacks can last for anything from a day to 10 days. Certain medications can be used as treatment to relieve symptoms and reduce uric acid levels. Another form of treatment is to make dietary changes to help prevent further attacks. Now, for the bad news. It is recommended to avoid the following foods: Alcohol, especially beer and hard liquor; Red meat and organ meat such as liver or kidneys, which are high in saturated fat; Seafood such as lobster, shrimp, sardines, anchovies, tuna, trout, mackerel, and haddock; Sugary drinks and foods high in fructose; and Processed foods and refined carbohydrates. Contrary to popular belief, fasting is not effective in preventing gout. Instead, it can actually increase the chances of an attack and should be avoided. A healthful diet for people with gout should include all the food groups. Foods such as low-fat dairy, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts help reduce the levels of uric acid. This is important as studies have shown that gout increases the risk of heart problems developing. Here are foods that are recommended: Low-fat dairy products - such as yogurt, cottage cheese; Whole grains; Eggs; Some lean meats such as chicken - approximately 2 ounces per day; Some fruits that are low in fructose, - strawberries and cherries; Vegetables - a diet rich in vegetables is good, such as spinach, mushrooms, asparagus, and cauliflower; Vegetable oils such as olive, canola, sunflower; Coffee; and Water - at least eight glasses per day.

In the America that I love, our main goal is to develop lifelong healthful eating habits and rely on medications only when needed.

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