

Orthopaedic Connection

Gout and Orthopaedics

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Gout is a medical condition and not an Orthopaedic Surgery condition as such. Nevertheless it does affect the joints and occurs often enough that I need to be aware of it in diagnosing painful swollen joints.

It would be easier to diagnose if it always affected the foot and typically the great toe. It usually does, but not invariably. The second most affected joint is the knee joint in my practice.

Gout often masquerades as infection. That's because the affected joint (it can be more than one) becomes painful, warm, swollen and reddened which are all characteristics of infection. If the patient has had the gout condition before, (which is often the case) they can usually be fairly sure about what is going on. But not always.

It is so painful and disabling that the affected patient can end up in an Urgent Care or Emergency Department.

Diagnosis

The classic test for Gout is a blood test called uric acid. There is always a certain amount of uric acid in our blood. As cells in our body die and are replaced by new cells (which is a completely normal process) a break down product is uric acid. The kidneys and gastrointestinal tract are in charge of eliminating uric acid from our body. It is a perfect example of homeostasis.

When the uric acid stays below the 6.8 number, no problem.

Why Does It Get Too High?

Good question. The answer is that Gout is primarily a genetic condition. Blame grandma and grandpa. Patients with Gout have usually inherited an inefficient system to eliminate uric acid. It is way more complicated, but I'm not teaching a physiology class, O.K.!

What Happens Next?

When the uric acid level gets too high (above 6.8) the uric acid can begin to leave the blood stream and head for the joints, tendons and tissue structure where it is not welcome by the body. It is not suppose to be there and when the body breaks it down uric acid crystals form in the joint space like the big toe. A gout attack has begun – redness, hot swollen painful joint. May not even be able to walk.

Myth: Rich Food and Alcohol Cause Gout

Rich food of certain types and alcohol don't in themselves cause the disease gout. The disease is linked to the genetic condition. Food and alcohol can contribute to a gout attack and trigger it.

Which Food and Alcohol?

Some foods are high in purines, which breaks down into uric acid. This can raise the blood uric acid way above 6.8 in people who already have the genetic tendency to not handle uric acid very well. An additional factor is that people who are overweight make more uric acid than those who are of normal weight.

Our demystifying Gout course will end here for the week. If you don't come back next week you get an incomplete in the Gout course.

My patients put their trust in me and what I do improves the quality of their lives.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website.

I sincerely appreciate all of you loyal readers and patients present and future and welcome all newcomers!

Besides what you read today there is a huge treasure trove of Orthopaedic and musculoskeletal information at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains the Website Library, Your Orthopaedic Connection and complete archive of every GCH article I have written.

I specialize in you. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush