



## St. Mary's Church

### Stewardship of the Body

“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps. 139)

## GOUT

**What is gout?** Gout is a form of arthritis; it is the second most common form of arthritis after osteoarthritis. About 4% of adults in the U.S. have been diagnosed with gout. The prevalence of gout has more than doubled nationwide between the 1960s and the 1990s. Experts believe that the increase in obesity and high blood pressure are partly to blame for the rise in gout.

**Who gets gout?** Gout is more common in men, but women are more susceptible to it after menopause.

**What causes gout?** Gout is caused by tiny needle-like crystals that build up in the joints. The crystals are made of uric acid which is a substance that normally dissolves in the blood and passes out of the body in urine. In some people the body either produces too much uric acid or the kidneys excrete too little uric acid leading to high blood levels of uric acid in the blood which allows the crystals to form in the joints. The crystals also can form in the kidneys, where they can create kidney stones.

**Where does the uric acid come from?** Uric acid comes from the breakdown of substances called Purines. Purines are naturally found in your body's tissues and in many foods. Eating purine-rich foods, such as organ meats, mussels, anchovies, asparagus and mushrooms, can bring on or worsen a gout attack. Alcohol or stress can also trigger an attack.

#### **What are some factors that can lead to gout?**

- Excessive alcohol use (more than 2 drinks a day for men and more than 1 for women)
- Untreated high blood pressure
- Other chronic conditions such as diabetes, high cholesterol and narrowing of the arteries
- Certain medications such as thiazide diuretics and low-dose aspirin can increase uric acid levels
- Family history of gout

#### **What are the signs and symptoms of gout?** Some of the symptoms of gout include:

- Intense joint pain, usually in the base of the big toe.
- Intense pain during the first 12 to 24 hours
- Pain and swelling also can occur in the feet, ankles, fingers, knees, hands and wrists.
- Tenderness and redness in the affected joint
- Symptoms often arise at night
- Lingering discomfort in the affected joint for a few days to a few weeks.
- Later attacks can last longer and affect more joints

**How is gout diagnosed?** Gout is diagnosed by a health care practitioner who will:

- Ask a lot of questions such as: what are the symptoms, what parts of the body are affected, when did they start, how bad are they, did something trigger them, what other conditions do you have, what medications do you take, is there a family history of gout, what do you eat, and how much alcohol do you drink.
- Do a physical exam, especially of the joints
- Check blood pressure
- Review the list of medications and over-the-counter preparations you are taking regularly
- Order some tests:
  - Joint fluid test: Withdrawing some fluid from the affected joint with a needle to examine under the microscope to see the uric acid crystals
  - Blood test: Measure the uric acid level in the blood

**How is gout treated?** The treatment of gout includes:

- Medications:
  - Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) to control inflammation and pain. They include ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, etc.) and naproxen (Aleve)
  - Indomethacin (Indocin), another NSAID. Side effects of NSAIDS include stomach pain, bleeding and ulcers.
  - Cochicine: a type of pain reliever that is not an NSAID. Side effects include nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.
  - Corticosteroids such as prednisone which can control gout inflammation and pain. They may be taken as pills or injected into the joint. Generally used for people who cannot tolerate or should not take NSAIDS. Side effects include: thinning bones, poor wound healing and lowered immunity.
  - Medications to reduce gout attacks and prevent complications:
    - Medications that limit the amount of uric acid made by the body (allopurinol, febuxostat)
    - Medications to improve uric acid removal (probenecid) improves the kidneys ability to remove uric acid from the body.
- Dietary changes: a moderate amount of protein, low fat or fat-free dairy, eggs and nut butters
- Avoid foods that are high in purines (liver, dried beans and peas, gravy and anchovies)
- Avoid high fructose corn syrup-sweetened beverages and foods
- Limit intake of meat, fish and poultry to 4 to 6 ounces
- Avoid alcohol
- Drink 8 to 16 cups of fluid daily with ½ being water
- Exercise regularly
- Maintain a healthy weight

Sources: [newsinhealth.nih.gov](http://newsinhealth.nih.gov)  
[Mayoclinic.org/diseases](http://Mayoclinic.org/diseases)