

Gout Is New Risk to Consider When You Opt for Low-Carb

Q. I've been on a low-carb, high-protein diet and I recently experienced an attack of gout. Could my diet be to blame?

A. Possibly. Diet is one of several factors linked to gout. Family history, age, gender, certain drugs, obesity, alcohol, high-purine foods and quick weight-loss diets may increase your chances of getting gout. Plus, there is growing concern that extremely low-carb diets, which are high in animal protein and fat, may exacerbate gout.

What Is Gout? Gout is a painful form of arthritis that occurs when the body produces too much uric acid or is unable to excrete it properly. Uric acid results from the breakdown of purines, substances found in all the body's tissues and in certain foods, such as meat and seafood. Excessive uric acid builds up in the blood, which in itself is not a problem. But if uric acid crystals form in the joints, gout develops. An acute attack of gout most often first affects the big toe, causing redness, swelling and intense pain. Over time, uric acid crystals

may also form in other joints, soft tissues and the kidneys.

The prevalence of gout is on the rise. That fact should come as no surprise since it is associated with obesity, high blood pressure, abnormal blood lipids and diabetes, conditions which are also on the upswing. Gout is most likely to strike men over 30 and, less frequently, postmenopausal women. It is treated primarily with medications to control the pain and inflammation of acute attacks, to reduce high blood uric acid levels and to help prevent future attacks and complications. However, proper diet may complement drug therapy and aid in the management of gout.

The Diet Connection. A high-purine diet is known to increase blood uric acid levels, but whether eating a diet low in purine-rich foods, like meat, seafood, mushrooms, spinach, asparagus and beans, reduces the incidence of gout is unclear. In a 12-year study of more than 47,000 male health professionals with no prior history of gout, researchers found that the risk was greatest in men who

ate the most seafood and meat and lowest in men who ate the most dairy products, especially low-fat dairy. Surprisingly, total protein intake did not affect the incidence of gout.

EN's Bottom Line. EN, with the help of Robert Terkeltaub, M.D., chief of rheumatology at the VA Medical Center in San Diego, offers these tips to manage gout and keep blood uric levels in check:

- Eat meat, seafood and alcohol in moderation; cut down on refined carbohydrates and foods high in saturated fat; cut back on portion sizes.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water, to help flush out excess uric acid.
- Maintain a healthy weight, but avoid extremely low-carb, ketogenic and rapid weight-loss diets, which may increase uric acid levels and worsen your gout.
- Take the medications prescribed by your doctor—they're your best defense against an attack of gout.

'Tis the Season for Soothing Sore Throats; EN Offers Help

Q. What can I take to help ease the pain of a sore throat?

A. First, be sure your sore throat isn't a sign of something serious. If a sore throat is accompanied by fever and no other telltale signs of a cold, like a runny nose, sneezing and watery eyes, it's important to see your doctor and rule out strep throat. Strep is a bacterial infection caused by the *Streptococcus bacterium*. It requires antibiotics, and if left untreated may lead to rheumatic fever, which can cause permanent damage to heart valves. Strep infection accounts for about 5% to 15% of sore throats in adults and about 15% to 30% of sore throats in children.

Still, most sore throats go hand in hand with colds, flu or even allergies. Here are some tried and true remedies for this annoying and painful ailment:

Salt water gargling is an age-old remedy for quelling sore throat discomfort. Experts believe it works because salt helps reduce the swelling of inflamed throat tissues. Try ¼ to ½ teaspoon of salt in eight ounces of warm

water. Gargle and repeat several times each day.

Warm liquids like tea, soup or broth soothe your throat due to their heat alone. Warm and hot liquids may also improve circulation, thus speeding healing.

Honey has long been believed to ease pain by coating the throat. New research shows that honey contains phenols, which possess antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. Compounds in honey also appear to prevent bacterial growth, reduce inflammation and promote tissue growth. Darker honeys, like buckwheat, have higher antioxidant activity than lighter varieties.

Herbs, particularly those containing mucilage, can offer soothing relief to an irritated throat. Slippery elm lozenges and *Throat Coat*, a tea containing slippery elm bark, are available at health food stores.

Licorice may soothe the lining of the throat, have anti-inflammatory effects

and suppress the coughing reflex. The recommended dose is five to 15 grams of powdered root a day, with no more than 200 to 600 milligrams of glycyrrhizin (the active ingredient).

Humidity is particularly helpful in easing a sore throat, as dry hot air can worsen it. Place pans of water near your heat source or set up one or more humidifiers to increase the humidity in your home. But be sure to clean humidifiers regularly or bacteria will build up.

EN's Bottom Line. If your sore throat worsens, doesn't show signs of letting up or you develop a fever, be sure to visit your doctor.

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