Alexander DIETETICS

Personalised Nutrition and Dietary Solutions

GOUT

Gout is a form of arthritis that occurs when excess uric acid** creates sodium urate crystals. These crystals build up in joints and cause swelling, redness and extreme pain. The joint of the big toe is usually the main one affected.

A gout attack may be induced by injury, excessive exercise, intercurrent infections, surgical procedures and dietary indiscretions such as binge drinking of alcohol.

Excess uric acid can also be formed from poor metabolism of purines. Purines come from nucleoproteins which are found in foods such as organ meats, sardines and legumes.

Drugs are used to reduce levels of uric acid. A low purine diet is recommended for acute attacks of gout and if uric acid stones are present.

Dietary treatment for chronic gout involves:

- Plenty of water.
- Weight reduction if overweight, but avoiding ‘crash” diets
- No alcohol
- Restriction of foods high in fats and protein
- Restriction of foods high in purines

Weight reduction must be gradual. Fast weight loss causes uric acid levels to increase and may precipitate an attack of gout. Maximum rate of weight loss should be 0.5 – 1.0 kg/week.

Alcohol is restricted because it causes the level of lactic acid in the blood to increase and lactic acid competes for the same excretory system through the kidneys as uric acid. When a lot of lactic acid is present the kidneys are not able to excrete uric acid. Plenty of water is required to promote kidney health and “flush” out unwanted toxins. Always drink extra fluid when exercising and do not drink alcohol before heavy exercise as lactic acid production increases during extensive exercise.

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susan@alexanderdietetics.com.au

Foods high in fat are restricted to assist weight loss and because a fatty diet can increase uric acid levels. Eat little or no fried foods, fast foods, pastries, cakes, biscuits, chocolates, fatty meat, cream, high fat cheeses, etc.

Total protein intake should be moderate and this can be achieved by eating only one moderate-sized serving of meat, fish or poultry a day. Legumes such as lentils, baked beans, chick peas, soya beans, etc. should also be limited to one serve per day. Eggs and dairy (although low purine) also count towards your protein intake.

Large quantities of foods high in purines should be avoided. Small amounts will do no damage. The foods which are highest in purines include lobster, mussels, prawns, mackerel, sardines, scallops, anchovies, fish roe, brains, sweetbreads, meat extracts and gravies made from pan drippings, heart, kidneys, liver, liver pate and liverwurst, stock cubes, gravy powder, Bonox, Vegemite, Promite, Marmite, beer, wine, bakers yeast and brewers yeast.

White fish, red meat, chicken, legumes, wholegrain cereals and oatmeal contain moderate amounts of purines. Some vegetables also contain moderate levels of purines including cauliflower, beans, asparagus, mushrooms and spinach.

Negligible amounts of purines are found in fruits, other vegetables, eggs, dairy, refined cereals, nuts, fat and sugar.

A few people may have problems with tomatoes and fruit juices such as orange and pineapple if consumed in large or regular quantities.

Drinking plenty of fluids especially water is very important. Two – three litres total fluid per day is recommended depending on your weight.

The most common triggers for gout are:

- Alcohol
- Insufficient fluid especially water
- Fast weight loss and “crash” diets
- Fasting, eg prior to surgery
- Injury to a joint.

** Uric Acid is the waste product made from the metabolism of purines. It is excreted as a component of urine. Excretion of uric acid can be decreased due to high levels of lactic acid.

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