

Gout, my personal story

Gout is a form of arthritis in which excessive build-up of uric acid in our body can lead to the formation of uric acid crystals that can get deposited in our joints and become the source of severe pain. According to literature about 1-2% of the population suffers from Gout, a painful condition occurring commonly among men, and causing excruciating painful swelling of the big toe and sometimes of other joints. The condition is prevalent among those with persistently elevated uric acid in the blood, and have difficulty in excreting excess uric acid from body.

I am not going to describe the disease, as one can read easily about it in the internet and Wikipedia.

In this article I am going to describe my own experience of living with the condition since my first bout in January 2006. As a doctor, with the knowledge of the condition and strongly believing in taking medicine only when all other measures have failed; relating my story and changing lifestyle to prevent bouts may be of help to others with the condition.

My first attack of gout was about two weeks after I had undergone groin hernia repair in 2006. The excruciating pain and swelling of my left big toe, came about without any notice. Within a very short time I could hardly walk. Had to use thongs as wearing shoe was impossible. I went to see my GP who prescribed high doses of colchicine, which I tried to take but with no relief. I do not recall what else I took but I might have taken strong painkillers as well. The pain and swelling lasted 4-5 days and eventually I had complete relief. My GP advised me afterwards to go on daily gout treatment with urate-lowering drug (allopurinol) to avoid any further attacks, but it will have to be a treatment for life.

This prompted me to read all about gout, its treatment and prevention. I realised that although treatment may be effective, it may also have side effects. Moreover, something that I will have to take all my remaining life. I consulted an able nutritionist; and was advised on a diet low in purines. Lowering purine intake is essential to control gout, as people suffering from gout have difficulty in excreting it from their system.

I have been following the advice ever since. The result is that I have had only four attacks in the last twelve years. Each time I could point at the reason for triggering the attack. Before I describe my attacks to specific causes, it is important to state that people suffering from gout show elevated levels of uric acid in blood (plasma) and I am not an exception. High blood uric acid is also a risk factor for other chronic conditions, not discussed here. My blood uric acid levels since 2002 have remained high between 7.0 to 8.7 mg/dl (normal 3.4-7.0 mg/dl), last tested in May 2017.

The first attack in January 2006 was soon after I had surgery for hernia repair. It is a well-known fact that any kind of surgery can trigger an episode of gout. My high uric acid level along with surgical stress could have been the reason for my first gout episode. The second attack was in January 2009. It was triggered by intake of concentrated mushroom soup (high in purines). In addition I had not taken Gout seriously and was not following any dietary restrictions. Second attack made me more alert and I started taking my nutritionist's advice seriously. Third attack in April 2014 was during my travels in Lesotho and I might have been careless about my diet. Most recent one in November 2018 was due to enjoying a

large *Dosa* and a bowl of *Sambar*, a South Indian dish, made of lentils. I had been also taking plenty of cauliflower as seasonal vegetable in India, which is also rich in purines. The first two episode were real bad ones and lasted for a week. Since then I have been very careful about my diet and consciously avoiding high purine foods. The last two episode have been mild, lasted only 2-3 days and I was not incapacitated. Mild analgesics helped me with the pain, which was bearable.

I believe my strict dietary control of limiting high purine foods have helped me to control my gouty condition. My lifestyle changes adopted to avoid getting a bout of gout consists of:

1. Avoiding following foods:
 1. Vegetables: mushrooms, spinach, lentils (legumes - beans), cauliflower, asparagus, oatmeal, wheat germ
 2. Meats: beef, chicken and lamb, innards in any form (liver, kidney, brain etc. specially patties),
 3. Sea food: prawns, shell fish, sardines, anchovies etc.
 4. Alcohol: Spirits, beers
2. Serious restriction on fatty foods, especially fast foods
3. Active intake of plenty of water during the day
4. Daily exercise followed by big glass of water with one squeezed lime and a pinch of salt (Vitamin C helps in reduction of Uric Acid)
5. Aim at body mass index of 25 – I struggle with it and am stuck at 27!

For detailed study of Gout go to [Gout Seminar - Lancet 2016](#)