

WHAT IS GOUT?

Gout is a type of **arthritis** that causes pain and swelling in the affected joints. It occurs when a substance in the blood called **urate** (also known as **uric acid**) forms **crystals** that build up in different parts of the body causing symptoms.

Gout usually develops in adulthood and is rare in children. It develops earlier in men (often between the ages of 30 and 45) than in women (usually after the age of 55) and is particularly common in people older than 65 years.



SYMPTOMS OF GOUT



Symptoms of gout can be different for each person and range from mild to serious. There may be times when patients have few or no symptoms and times when symptoms are more active (**gout flares** or **attacks**).

Common symptoms of a **gout attack** include pain, redness, swelling and tenderness of the affected joint which usually worsen within the first 24 hours before resolving completely within a few days or weeks, even if left untreated.

Gout attacks can occur at any time. Most first attacks affect a single joint, usually at the base of the big toe. Over time, attacks can involve multiple joints in the body.



Tophi at the big toe

Although symptoms of gout tend to go away on their own, gout attacks may become more regular, more severe and affect more joints if left **untreated**.

Over time, the build-up of crystals may form masses in the joints called **tophi**, which can **damage joints** and **restrict** movement. Crystals may also build up as **stones** in the kidneys, which can cause **kidney damage** if left untreated.

PREVENTING GOUT ATTACKS WITH ALLOPURINOL

Lifestyle changes can help prevent or reverse the build-up of crystals, leading to fewer attacks. For patients with regular gout attacks, severe symptoms, joint damage or kidney stones, a drug called **allopurinol** may be prescribed by doctors to help prevent further gout attacks.^{1,2,3}

Allopurinol tablets are one of the most **common** drugs used to **lower urate levels** in the blood. They are usually taken for several **weeks or months** before levels drop to a target range, and symptoms improve. During this time, doctors will monitor the patient's urate levels and slowly adjust the amount of allopurinol that is needed.



THINGS TO NOTE WHILE TAKING ALLOPURINOL

- When you first start treatment with allopurinol, you may have more gout attacks as the drug starts to work. You should continue to take it every day even if this happens.
- Allopurinol is generally **safe** but may cause side effects such as diarrhoea in some people.
- **Rarely**, some patients taking allopurinol can have a serious side effect that mainly involves the skin, known as **severe cutaneous adverse reaction** (SCAR^{2,3}). SCAR needs to be treated immediately in the hospital because it could be life-threatening.



WHAT ARE SOME OF THE EARLY SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SCAR?

SCAR usually starts with flu-like symptoms, followed by a painful rash that spreads and blisters. You can also get mouth ulcers and painful, red or gritty eyes.

Flu-like symptoms include



Sore throat



Fever



Muscle aches



Painful red or purple rash that can spread, form blisters and cause skin peeling



Mouth ulcers



Red or gritty eyes



SCAR is **more likely** to occur:

- during the first **three months** of starting allopurinol,
- or when the dose is increased.

WHO MAY DEVELOP SCAR?

Most people do not develop SCAR while taking allopurinol. While it is not possible to know exactly who will develop SCAR, you may be at **higher risk** if you have medical issues such as kidney problems. Discuss with your **doctor** if you have any concerns about using allopurinol.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Watch out for early signs and symptoms of SCAR. If you **suspect** that you have SCAR, you should:



Stop taking the drug



Take a **photo** of the rash to show a doctor



See a **doctor immediately** and tell them you are taking allopurinol

KEY MESSAGES

- **Untreated** gout may get more serious over time and cause **lasting damage** to joints or kidneys.
- Allopurinol is a **safe and effective** drug for preventing gout attacks.
- However, some patients taking allopurinol may have a **small chance** of developing SCAR. You should **stop** taking allopurinol and see a **doctor immediately** if you **suspect** this is happening.
- Ask your doctor for further advice if you have any concerns about using allopurinol. **Click here** to learn more about treatments for gout.

Sources

1. ACE Clinical Guidance on Gout — *Achieving the management goal*, Updated 14 December 2023
2. www.hsa.gov.sg/consumer-safety/articles/safe-use-of-allopurinol
3. www.healthhub.sg/a-z/medications/allopurinol



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