

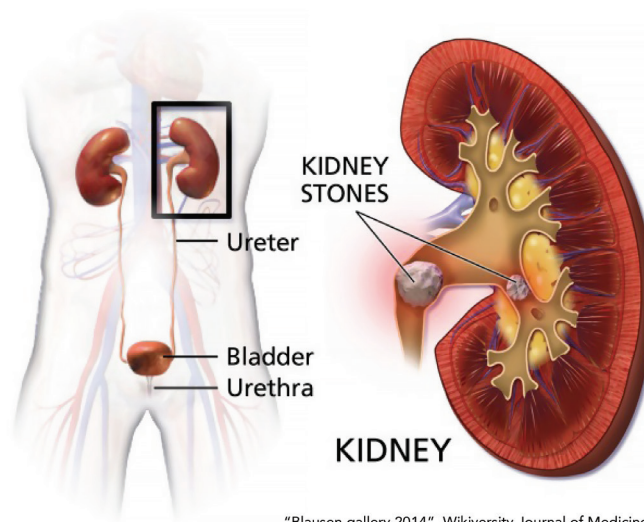
The Gout and Kidney Connection

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Gout affects a growing number of people worldwide – and an estimated 8.3 million Americans – yet, the disease remains widely misunderstood. While gout incidence is on the rise in the U.S., research from the Gout & Uric Acid Education Society has shown that many people do not recognize gout as a “serious” condition. However, if left untreated, gout can have devastating health consequences – especially for those with existing kidney problems, such as kidney disease or kidney stones.

Gout is caused by an accumulation of uric acid crystals in the joints and other tissues. Over time, these crystals can lead to painful attacks of gout, which are characterized by sudden pain, warmth and swelling in one or more joints. While people who have gout know very well that it is painful – with the majority ranking their pain as a nine or 10 on a standard pain scale – they do not always understand that gout is a chronic issue that requires immediate and lifelong treatment, beyond treatment during a flare-up. If uric acid levels are not lowered in a person who has gout, flares will persist over time and permanent damage to the joints, bones and tissue can occur.

While those who have gout are more likely to have kidney disease – an estimated 83 percent more likely, according to recent research – those who have kidney



“Blausen gallery 2014”. Wikiversity Journal of Medicine

disease are also more likely to suffer from gout and elevated uric acid levels. Uric acid typically dissolves into the bloodstream, processes through the kidneys, and leaves the body through the urine. However, in patients with kidney disease, it will be more difficult for the kidneys to get rid of uric acid, which not only increases the risk for gout, but also may contribute to decreased kidney function and worse outcomes.

It is important for treatment to begin early – even at the initial attack – to avoid long-term damage. Once a gout diagnosis is made, steps need to be taken, including lowering uric acid to the recommended level of below 6

mg/dL. For the large majority of people, a typical treatment plan includes taking uric acid-lowering medications to keep uric acid at a healthy level. However, because many gout medications can be potentially harmful to the kidneys, many physicians who treat patients with kidney problems put more emphasis on treatments beyond medications, such as lifestyle changes. Specific treatment recommendations for people with kidney problems may include getting regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight; staying hydrated; and carefully managing diet by avoiding certain foods that are high in purines (i.e. red meat, seafood and beer) and foods that contain high-fructose corn syrup.

The gout and kidney connection is clear – when the kidneys have been compromised, they may not be able to process uric acid, causing it to buildup in the bloodstream, which can ultimately lead to gout. However, people with kidney disease or other related kidney problems can reduce their risk for gout through a proper treatment plan. Early diagnosis and ongoing treatment and management are critical to preventing future gout flares and long-term kidney damage.

The Gout & Uric Acid Education Society is a nonprofit organization made up of health care professionals whose mission it is to educate the public and health care community about gout. To learn more, visit GoutEducation.org. ■

TIPS FOR CONTROLLING GOUT AND PROTECTING YOUR KIDNEYS

If you have gout, hyperuricemia or kidney disease, talk to your doctor to learn how you can protect your health and prevent long-term damage.

- **Know your numbers.** Routine blood tests can check to see if you have elevated uric acid and to measure your kidney function (glomerular filtration rate).
- **Take medications as directed.** Your doctor may prescribe medications to keep uric acid levels low and gout flares at bay. Medications must be taken as prescribed, and should not be stopped – even if levels improve – without consulting a doctor.
- **Drink plenty of water.** Drink at least eight cups of water a day to help flush the kidneys and remove uric acid from the bloodstream.
- **Avoid trigger foods.** Your doctor may ask that you stay away from high-purine foods (red meat, shellfish and alcohol) and those that contain high-fructose corn syrup (processed foods and soft drinks).
- **Make healthy lifestyle choices.** Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy body weight. Avoid smoking.
- **Control other health issues.** Obesity, high blood pressure, high lipid levels and diabetes can elevate uric acid – leading to gout flares and damaging the kidneys.
- **Tell your doctor what medications and supplements you are taking.** Some may be raising your uric acid level.