

A SIMPLE GUIDE

To Healthy Living

JAN-MAR 2018 ISSUE 55

MICA (P) 129/08/2017



Eastern Community Health Outreach

**FEELING
BLOATED?**

There's more to
it than it seems

UNDERSTANDING
GOUT

Is your painful toe
due to gout?

A GOODNIGHT'S REST

Tips to achieve that restful slumber

GOT GOUT?

AUTHOR DR MELONIE K. SRIRANGANATHAN, Consultant, Rheumatology Department, Changi General Hospital



GOUT IS A COMPLEX FORM OF ARTHRITIS AND CAN AFFECT ANYONE. AN ATTACK CAN OCCUR SUDDENLY, WAKING YOU UP IN PAIN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. LET'S UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS AGONISING CONDITION IS AND HOW TO TACKLE IT.

WHAT IS GOUT?

Gout is one of the most common causes of inflammatory arthritis. It presents as a sudden onset of pain and swelling affecting a joint. The pain can be very severe, and some patients have described it as worse than labour pain!

Gout most commonly affects the big toe, but can affect other joints such as knees, ankles, wrists and hands. It can be associated with other conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and high lipids. These conditions are also associated with the metabolic syndrome.

Though common worldwide, it is particularly prevalent in Singapore. However, patients with gout continue to suffer attacks for many years before they seek treatment.

WHY DO WE DEVELOP GOUT?

Gout is caused by high levels of uric acid in the blood, known as

hyperuricaemia. At high levels, uric acid migrates into a joint and forms crystals. These crystals cause inflammation which leads to pain and swelling.

WHAT CAUSES HYPERURICAEMIA?

Hyperuricaemia, or high uric acid levels, can be caused by several reasons:



Trigger foods

Certain foods and drinks can increase our uric acid levels and predispose us to gout. These include shell fish such as crab, small fish such as ikan bilis, red meat, peanuts, fructose sweetened soft drinks, beer and stout. Some patients find that eating these foods can even trigger an attack of gout.



Too much production

Sometimes our body may produce more uric acid. This can be due to obesity or less common inherited conditions.



Too little excretion

This could be due to the kidneys not working as well as they should.

WHY SHOULD I GET TREATMENT FOR GOUT?

Gout is treatable. However, if not treated early, you can develop problems due to chronic gout such as lumps known as tophi, kidney stones or damage to joints. These take much longer to resolve, and may not be completely reversible. As soon as you have your first attack of gout, you should consider lifestyle changes that can prevent you from having more attacks.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT GOUT?

Lifestyle changes can make a big difference in preventing gout. These include:

- **Losing weight**
- **Reducing alcohol intake**
- **Watching your diet**
 - Avoid foods that can trigger gout.



- Eat more fresh vegetables and fruit.
- Cut down on sweetened and/or fizzy soft drinks such as cola. Drink plenty of water instead.

HOW IS GOUT TREATED?

Medication can be given during the attack of gout to lessen pain and swelling. Your doctor will assess and prescribe these medications.. These medications do not reduce uric acid, hence are only given as a short course until the attack has settled.

If lifestyle changes are not enough to control gout, you may need regular medication. This is aimed at lowering uric acid. Treatment is often life-long, and you may need regular blood tests to monitor the drug and condition.

PUT AN END TO PAIN

Gout can be a very painful condition affecting your joints, but all is not lost. It can be treated! If you think you may have gout, seek help soon.

LET'S CELEBRATE THE BRAND NEW 2018

AUTHOR DR LINSEY UTAMI GANI, ECHO Programme Director

Dear Readers,

Happy New Year 2018! I hope you had a wonderful new year's celebration with your family and loved ones! The multiple celebrations over these few months may mean we are at a higher likelihood of consuming richer and higher calorie food in this season. For some of us who are prone to gout, these festive occasions may be trying and potentially trigger gout attacks.



Gout affects nearly 5% of our population with an average age onset of 55 years old¹. Many patients however don't seek treatment and may suffer with pain for prolonged period before seeking medical advice. In this issue, we have invited Dr Melonie K. Sriranganathan, who is a Rheumatologist from Changi General Hospital to give us some basic tips about gout and how to treat it.

We also feature our GPFirst programme again, to continue encouraging our readers to make full use of GPs available in the community to provide first line investigations and treatment for most common complaints such as abdominal pain and bloating. Our mental health counsellor also sheds some light on how our health and lifestyles may affect our mental health and well-being.

ECHO is also releasing new screening dates for 2018. I encourage you to keep a lookout for the dates in 2018 when we are in your area for the next health screening. Please log on to our website at www.echohealth.com.sg to check out the dates.

We look forward to meeting you in this New Year and continue encouraging you to celebrate the new start to a healthy and active life!

¹ <http://www.singhealth.com.sg/doctorsandhealthprofessionals/medical-news/2013/pages/gout.aspx>

YOUR GPs CAN TREAT THIS CONDITION

AUTHOR DR DEREK LEONG, Resident Family Physician



In January 2014, the GPFirst Programme was launched to encourage patients in eastern Singapore to see their general practitioners (GPs) for mild-to-moderate conditions rather than head to the emergency department first. In this regular series, our Eastern GPs offer advice on common ailments the community might face.

Visit www.gpfirst.sg or see your GP for more information on common conditions such as cuts, bruises, mild scalds, nausea, headaches, sprains and fevers. This issue touches on a very common condition experienced – abdominal pain.

ABDOMINAL PAIN & BLOATING

Many Singaporeans experience a hectic work-life and often have irregular meals or skip their meal(s) at times. Such habits, if prolonged, may cause *Functional Dyspepsia*, or what is commonly and loosely known as “**Gastritis**”. As there are other more serious abdominal conditions that need to be ruled out, it is therefore advisable to have the condition reviewed by a General Practitioner (GP).

Patients with *Dyspepsia* will have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Feeling of fullness or bloating after eating

- Inability to finish a normal-sized meal or feeling full with only a small amount of food
- Epigastric (otherwise known as “*upper central abdomen*”) pain or burning sensation

Dyspepsia may also be associated with other risk factors, such as alcohol consumption, use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID)s and stress. If one reduces these risk factors, the incidence of gastritis will also be reduced.

A GP can review the symptoms and perform a targeted physical examination to assess if an individual has a serious condition that requires a visit to the A&E for urgent evaluation. Symptoms that may suggest a more serious condition include, persistent vomiting (especially if there is blood in the vomit, evidence of gastrointestinal bleeding (black stools), difficulty in swallowing, unintended weight loss over a short period of time, and a family history of cancer. The GP will also advise whether any further non-urgent evaluation would be required, which can be performed at a later date.

Your GP is able to prescribe medications such as antacid to cope with the acidity in your stomach. GPs are also equipped with tests that can detect whether there is an infection, before referring you to a specialist for further treatment. So check with your GP first, to see if your case can be managed without excessive steps along the way!



Weighing the Connection between Our Body and Mind

AUTHOR LIM HUI KHIM, Principal Mental Health Counsellor, Health Wellness Programme



OUR WEIGHT AND MENTAL HEALTH SEEM TO BE SEPARATED ISSUES, BUT ARE THEY? FIND OUT HOW, IN MANY INSTANCES, THEY ARE INTRICATELY AND INEVITABLY LINKED.



Studies have shown people who suffer from mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety or bipolar disorders have an increased risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease and Type 2 Diabetes. People who suffer from obesity and related diseases are prone to a decline in mental health.

The biological link is possibly the shared vulnerability between severe mental illness, abnormal metabolic processes and unhealthy lifestyles. Metabolism is how our body processes nutrients and is essentially what drives weight loss. The faster one's metabolism, the more calories are burned. If this system is slowed by poor nutrition, lack of sleep, medication, etc., one could experience serious, long-term side effects such as weight gain, digestive issues and fatigue.

Our mental health is influenced by many different factors, and any one of them can have a direct impact on how our body functions on a day-to-day basis. Here are some things to take note of:

Diet and Nutrition - Overeating, not eating enough, or eating wrongly can lead to our metabolism slowing down and becoming sluggish, which compounds other symptoms you might be experiencing. Speak to a nutritionist or dietician about a diet that is appropriate and balanced for you, especially if you have restricted dietary requirements.

Medication - If you are currently taking medication for mental illness, it is important to understand the possible side effects. If you are on several different types of medication, ensure that you talk to your pharmacist or doctor to fully understand any possible contra-indications or potential harmful effect of mixing different medications.

Stress or mental health conditions - Mental health conditions or poorly managed stress can make our day-to-day activities extremely challenging. For example, someone with depression or anxiety may

struggle with maintaining a healthy diet, fitness and social routine. Read up on self-help books, learn to manage your stress, and seek help by talking to a trained mental health professional.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle - Maintaining optimal physical and mental well-being involves having balanced nutrition, healthy lifestyle habits and adequate physical activity. Any form of exercise helps increase our metabolic rate and can help one cope with stress better. Develop a realistic exercise plan that suits you. Start small and simple!

Living a meaningful Life - Without a sense of purpose, or meaning in life, a person can lose motivation or drive to take care of themselves and become overweight and unhappy. Start by making a list of the important things in your life and re-evaluating your needs, life goals and values. Learn to live mindfully and be socially connected with family, friends or community.

PART 3

BREAK-ME-NOT: MANAGING BRITTLE BONES WITH EXERCISE

AUTHOR **TOH XI EN**, Physiotherapist, Changi General Hospital



LET'S NOT BREAK THE HABIT! A CONTINUATION FROM LAST ISSUE, WE BRING YOU MORE EXERCISES TO STRENGTHEN YOUR BONES.

There are simply too many ways to build up your bone strength, so no more excuses! Last issue we introduced some easy exercises you can do at the stairs or at a wall. With the aid of an exercise band, you can explore many more routines. Here are some simple exercises you can do to strengthen your hips, shoulders and biceps.



Muscle strengthening exercises with exercise band



SIDE HIP EXERCISE

Bring your leg out to the side, while keeping your knee straight. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets.



BACK HIP EXERCISE

Extend your hips to the back, while keeping your knee straight. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets.



SHOULDER MUSCLES EXERCISE

Bring both your arms out to your side, while keeping elbows straight. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets.



BICEPS EXERCISE

Flex your elbows while keeping your arms to your side. Hold for 5-10 seconds. Repeat 10 times. Do 3 sets.



REFERENCES

<https://www.agingcare.com/articles/exercise-for-bone-health-133151.htm>
<https://eldergym.com/exercise-for-osteoporosis.html>
<https://www.nof.org/patients/fracturesfall-prevention/exercisesafe-movement/osteoporosis-exercise-for-strong-bones/>



A Goodnight Sleep

AUTHOR LIM HUI KHIM, Principal Mental Health Counsellor, Health Wellness Programme



DIFFICULTIES FALLING ASLEEP? HAVEN'T HAD A RESTFUL NIGHT'S SLEEP IN AGES? MANY OF US EXPERIENCE THAT. IT CAN BE CHANGED AND IMPROVED, AS WE CAN ACHIEVE STRESS-FREE SLUMBER AND ACHIEVE QUALITY SLEEP WITH THESE TIPS.

Most of us take sleep for granted until we start experiencing difficulties with it. To tackle sleep problems, we need to investigate the cause of the problem and identify the best strategies to use. Good habits can promote good sleep, and habits take time to cultivate or change. However, consistency and persistence will pay off.

Good or quality sleep happens when both the body and mind can wind down and relax. The steps listed below can help you sleep better if you practise them diligently and consistently for a few weeks:



Step 1. Set up a wake up time and stick to it daily (including weekends).

Remember that consistency helps form good sleep habits. Avoid sleeping in or lying in bed on weekend as that will affect how your brain associate with sleep.



Step 2. Prepare your body to wind down and relax starting from the afternoon.

Stop your caffeine intake at least six hours before you want to sleep. Do cardiovascular exercise regularly to help you sleep deeper, but ensure that you stop vigorous exercise at least 2 hours before bedtime to give your body time to wind down. Reduce alcohol intake and smoking as these can affect your sleep cycle. Do not nap for more than 30 minutes during the day, as this may affect your state of sleep at night. Do deep breathing exercises to relax tension.



Step 3. Prepare your room for better sleep.

Imagine your bedroom as a spa – reduce clutter, ensure it's dark enough and that the temperature is just right. You can also use

aromatherapy scents such as lavender and valerian, or play light ambient music to make it more relaxing.



Step 4. Have a good pre-sleep routine.

Spend the last hour winding down by doing simple stretches and some light reading. Avoid watching movies and dramas that will stimulate your brain. Switch off your computer and television as the brightness of these devices can make you more awake. Don't keep your worries at bed-time, learn to better manage your stress and worries.



Step 5. Go to bed only when you feel sleepy.

If you do not feel sleepy, stay out of bed or outside your room. Do relaxation exercises or boring tasks (such as reading a telephone book) until you feel tired. Every time you wake up at night and cannot sleep again, go outside and do more relaxation exercises until you are drowsy.

Practice these 5 steps daily and you should notice some improvements in your sleep after 2 or 3 weeks. Everyone can achieve a good night's rest with good sleep hygiene.

2018 ECHO HEALTH SCREENING

The ECHO health screenings in Marine Parade and Tampines are coming soon.

SPREAD THE NEWS! If you have family members, friends or relatives residing in the following constituencies, please encourage them to register for the ECHO health screening!

Note: You will no longer be receiving invitation letters by post! If you need to change your mailing address, please email to ECHO@cgh.com.sg or contact our ECHO coordinators during office hours.



HOW TO REGISTER?

- 1) Log on to www.echohealth.com.sg for online registration when registration starts, payment by VISA / MASTERCARD only.
- 2) Register in-person @ respective CCs listed (right) when registration starts. Bring along your NRIC, together with your cash payment to register.

Screening Site	Health Screening		Registration Start Date
	Day 1	Day 2	
Marine Parade CC	17 Mar (Sat)	-	9 Jan 2018
Tampines North CC	14 Apr (Sat)	15 Apr (Sun)	6 Feb 2018
Tampines Changkat CC	28 Apr (Sat)	29 Apr (Sun)	
Tampines West CC	12 May (Sat)	13 May (Sun)	

CONTACT ECHO!

Please keep your subject: ATTN to ECHO Programme

✉ Mailing Address: 5 Tampines Central, Tampines Plaza
#08-01/05, Singapore 529541

@ E-mail Address: ECHO@cgh.com.sg

🌐 Website: www.echohealth.com.sg

☎ Telephone: 6788 8833

Monday – Friday, 9am – 5.30pm (excluding eve & public holidays)



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