

# Patient Patient

With **GARY HO**

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## **Q** What do you wish you'd known when you first developed gout?

That the experts really do know what they're talking about. It took me 16 years to discover that.

I wasted far too much time exploring home remedies and clinging to folklore about how to manage gout without proper medication. I was okay taking pain medication when attacks came on, but for some reason I couldn't accept that I needed to take allopurinol every day. I see that with other patients too, the mentality that "I don't want to be that guy who's reliant on medications."

So instead I spent 16 years with monthly gout attacks. I used crutches and a wheelchair regularly. I lost 20% of my kidney function through prolonged use of naproxen and steroids. It took me hitting rock bottom to finally embrace advice from a rheumatology provider.

## **Q** How did you find the right health care provider?

It was very difficult. I met plenty of doctors along the way who downplayed gout. When I sought treatment at age 24, one doctor told me, "You're too young to have gout."

So I did my own research and decided to visit a rheumatologist. Meeting him was a breath of fresh air. The first thing he did was just listen. He let me tell him everything I was experiencing. He said, "What you're experiencing is typical. It's a progressive disease."

He started me on allopurinol. After years of me trying yams, cherry juice and turmeric, he brought me back to reality. From there it took time. I needed a specialized infused medication. But I was determined from that point forward not to give up. I realized that if we don't manage gout, gout manages us.

## **Q** What's the hardest stigma to break through?

The severity of gout. My friends used to call me "gout boy." They meant it as a term of endearment, but to me it was clear they didn't understand the pain.

*Gout is viewed differently than other sources of pain.*

Say you have a condition like chronic back pain. You can call in to work, you can ask for a day off, you can apply for disability even. But with gout? The response is, "Oh, isn't that self-induced?" People assume you're eating too much meat or drinking too much alcohol.

It's an unfair stereotype. For many people with gout, it's not about our diet. It's about our body being unable to get rid of uric acid. We can eat Keto, low fat, vegetarian, you name it. But diet alone won't solve the problem.

## **Q** What question do you most often get from gout patients?

How to get rid of the pain. It makes sense. When an attack comes on, it's the most excruciating pain ever. All you want is immediate relief.

I tell them: There are two approaches. Yes, there's short-term pain management. But more importantly you have to look at managing the actual disease that causes the pain.

You have to know your uric acid level. That's my number one advice to patients. It's like a diabetic knowing his blood glucose level. My rheumatologist tells me about uric acid, "If it's over a 6, you need a fix." We live by that advice.

## **Q** What words of hope would you offer?

You're not alone. Gout can be a very lonely disease. Nobody wants to talk about it.

I say, embrace the fact that you have gout. This is an opportunity to take back control. Embrace the fact that there are proven methods to successfully treat the disease. People think they'll forever be stuck with pain, or that they won't ever again be able to enjoy food. That's not true.

Once you embrace reality, seek professional help and tackle it head on, life gets so much better. You *can* have quality of life with gout.

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