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Diseases of Civilization

Gout Alarm

The Best Therapies Against the Endemic Disease

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Gout – a term that sounds to many like a disease from past centuries. But the reality is different: More and more people in modern societies are affected. Gout is now considered a disease of civilization – triggered by excess, lack of exercise and an unbalanced diet. What is behind this painful joint disease, and how can naturopathy help? This article gives an overview of causes, symptoms and holistic therapeutic approaches for gout.

Gout is a metabolic disease caused by an increased uric acid level in the blood (hyperuricemia). Uric acid is produced when purines are broken down, which are formed in the body itself, but are also absorbed through food. Normally, uric acid is excreted through the kidneys. If production is too high or excretion too low, uric acid levels rise. If this exceeds a certain limit, uric acid crystals are formed, which are deposited in joints and tissues and lead to painful inflammation known as gout attacks.

Symptoms and course

A typical gout attack occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, often during the night hours. The metatarsophalangeal joint of the big toe is most commonly affected, followed by ankles, knees, wrists and finger joints. The affected area swells severely, becomes red, overheated and is very sensitive to touch. The pain is often so severe that even the weight of the duvet seems unbearable. The attack reaches its peak within a few hours and can last for several days. Fever, a general feeling of illness and limited mobility of the joint often accompany the acute flare-up. After the attack has subsided, the joint often remains sensitive and slightly swollen for some time. If left untreated, gout attacks can occur more frequently over time and affect other joints. Repeated attacks lead to chronic joint damage and the formation of gout nodules (tophi), in which uric acid crystals are permanently deposited. Kidney stones and kidney damage are possible consequences of long-lasting hyperuricemia. This makes it all the more important to act quickly at the first sign of gout disease and to initiate measures to reduce uric acid.

Risk factors

One of the most important risk factors is a diet rich in purines, i.e. too much meat, organ meats, seafood and certain types of fish. The consumption of high-sugar drinks and alcohol, especially beer, also significantly increases the risk. Obesity plays a central role, because it both increases uric acid production and inhibits its excretion via the kidneys. A sedentary lifestyle promotes the development of gout, because it promotes obesity and metabolic disorders. Those who have relatives with gout are more at risk. Certain medications, such as diuretics, some antihypertensive drugs or cancer treatment drugs, can also increase uric acid levels. Chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure and lipid metabolism disorders are often accompanied by increased uric acid levels. Men are affected more often than women, especially from middle age. In women, the risk increases after menopause because the protective estrogen is lost. The interaction of these factors determines the individual risk of gout.

Diagnosis

Gout is diagnosed by a combination of typical symptoms and laboratory tests. In an acute attack, the affected joint has redness, swelling and severe pain. To confirm this, the uric acid level in the blood is measured, with elevated values indicating hyperuricemia. However, uric acid levels can also be normal during an acute attack. The safest diagnostic method is the detection of uric acid crystals in the synovial fluid, which is taken from the inflamed joint with a fine needle. Ultrasound or X-rays can help to visualize joint damage or gout nodules.

Basic Conventional Medical Therapy

The conventional medical treatment of gout pursues two main goals: the rapid alleviation of acute symptoms and the long-term reduction of uric acid levels to prevent further attacks and complications.

Acute Therapy

In acute gout attacks, the focus is on rapid pain relief. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen or diclofenac are used for this purpose, which effectively inhibit inflammation and pain. If NSAIDs are not tolerated or contraindicated, colchicine or, in severe cases, low-dose corticosteroids (e.g. prednisolone) are used. Colchicine is effective against the inflammatory reaction, but can cause diarrhea or nausea. The choice of medication depends on individual factors such as adjunctive diseases and tolerability.

Long-term Therapy (Inter-critical Phase)

The aim of long-term therapy is to permanently reduce the uric acid level below the critical value of 6 mg/dl (360 μ mol/l) in order to prevent new attacks and consequential damage such as gout nodules or kidney disease. Uricostatics such as allopurinol or febuxostat are used for this purpose. They inhibit the enzyme xanthine oxidase and the formation of uric acid in the body. In the case of intolerance, uricosurics (e.g. benzbromarone, probenecid) can be prescribed, which promote the excretion of uric acid via the kidneys. Drug therapy is usually continued for life.

Dietary And Lifestyle Measures

An essential part of basic therapy is the change in lifestyle habits. These include a low-purine diet (little meat, sausage, organ meats and seafood) as well as avoiding alcohol and sugary drinks. A balanced, plant-based diet, rich in vegetables, dairy products and whole grains is recommended. Excess weight should be reduced, as this lowers uric acid levels and reduces the risk of further attacks. Regular exercise and sufficient fluid intake support the excretion of uric acid.

Monitoring And History

Regular checks of uric acid levels are necessary in order to check the success of therapy and adjust medication if necessary. Kidney function should be checked regularly, as gout is associated with an increased risk of kidney damage.

Complementary Medical Therapeutic Approaches

Complementary medical therapeutic approaches for gout are becoming increasingly important, as many patients are looking for alternative (gentler) or complementary treatment options.

Phytotherapy

Plants with a diuretic effect such as nettle, birch leaves and goldenrod have proven particularly effective for gout. They promote the flushing out of uric acid via the kidneys and can be taken as

a tea, extract or ready-to-use preparation. Devil's claw is also popular due to its anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties. Cherry juice and sour cherries are known for their uric acid-lowering effect and can be integrated into the diet. Dandelion and horsetail have a dehydrating and metabolism-stimulating effect. Individual coordination is recommended for use, as not every plant is equally suitable for every patient.

Homeopathy

Homeopathy offers various approaches for the supportive treatment of gout. Its aim is to stimulate the body's self-healing powers and to alleviate acute complaints as well as chronic courses. The selection of the appropriate remedy depends on the symptoms and the constitution of the patient. One of the frequently used homeopathic remedies for gout is *Colchicum autumnale* (Autumn crocus), which is recommended for severe pain, swelling and hypersensitivity of the joints. *Ledum palustre* (Marsh Labrador Tea) is used for stabbing pain and swelling in the lower extremities, when cold provides relief. *Benzoicum acidum* is often chosen when the symptoms are accompanied by foul-smelling urine and changing joint complaints. *Berberis vulgaris* has a supportive effect when kidney problems also occur. *Bryonia alba* is indicated when the pain is intensified by movement and rest brings relief. Dosage and selection of potency should be done individually and by an experienced homeopath. The remedies can be administered as globules, tablets or drops.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is often used to support the treatment of gout. It is intended to relieve pain, reduce inflammation and activate the body's own self-healing powers. By placing needles at certain acupuncture points, blood circulation in the joint can be improved and the energy flow (Qi) can be harmonized. The treatment has proven particularly effective in acute gout attacks to reduce the intensity of the pain and restore mobility. Even in the symptom-free phase, acupuncture can help to prevent new attacks and increase well-being. The selection of points depends on the symptoms and can be supplemented by moxibustion or electroacupuncture.

Alkaline Fasting

Alkaline fasting aims to balance the acid-base balance of the body and counteract hyperacidity. Alkaline fasting can help with gout, because hyperacidity of the organism inhibits uric acid excretion and can promote gout attacks. During an alkaline fasting cure, mainly alkaline-forming foods such as vegetables, salads, potatoes, ripe fruit, herbs and nuts are consumed. Acid-forming foods such as meat, sausage, white flour products, fish, dairy products, sugar, coffee and alcohol are largely avoided. The aim is to improve urinary acid excretion via the kidneys, reduce inflammatory processes and increase well-being. Many sufferers report a significant alleviation of symptoms, less joint pain and better mobility. It is important to drink enough to additionally promote the excretion of uric acid. Alkaline fasting is particularly suitable as a short-term measure to support gout therapy and helps to establish healthier eating habits in the long term.

Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy uses the effect of water at different temperatures and applications to relieve pain, inhibit inflammation and promote blood circulation. In acute gout attacks, cold compresses,

poultices or quark compresses have proven to be effective, as they can quickly reduce swelling and pain in the joint. Cold foot or hand baths are also helpful in dampening the inflammatory reaction. In the symptom-free phase, alternating warm applications such as Kneipp showers, alternating showers or rising temperature baths can improve blood circulation and stimulate the metabolism. These measures support the excretion of uric acid via the kidneys and strengthen the immune system. In chronic gout, warm baths with additives such as hay flowers, rosemary or essential oils have a relaxing and pain-relieving effect. It is important to adapt hydrotherapy to the patient's condition. During acute attacks, exclusively cold applications should be used, because heat can increase inflammation.

Detoxification Procedures

Detoxification procedures aim to rid the body of waste products and metabolic end products. In the case of gout, various drainage methods are used in addition to conventional medical therapy. Among the best known are cupping, in which blood circulation is stimulated by negative pressure on the skin and local detoxification is promoted, and the Baunscheidt method, in which the skin is treated with fine needles and then rubbed with special oils. The use of leeches can also provide relief for painful, inflamed joints, as the leeches release saliva with anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving substances and at the same time extract a small amount of blood. Cantharide plasters or bloodletting are used to relieve the metabolism. The aim of all drainage procedures is to promote the excretion of uric acid and other metabolic products, reduce inflammation and support the self-healing powers.

Nutritional Therapy

Nutritional therapy plays a central role in gout, as the disease is closely linked to lifestyle and diet. It is important to permanently lower the uric acid level in the blood and prevent new gout attacks. A low-purine diet is important: meat, sausage, organ meats, seafood and fish should be greatly reduced, because they are rich in purines, which are broken down into uric acid in the body. Instead, a plant-based diet with lots of vegetables, fruit, whole grain products and low-fat dairy products that contain little purines and support the metabolism is recommended. Beer should be avoided as it inhibits uric acid excretion and increases the risk of gout attacks. Sugary drinks and highly processed foods are also unfavorable. Sufficient fluid intake through water and unsweetened teas promotes uric acid excretion via the kidneys. Obesity should be reduced, as it increases uric acid levels. Nutritional therapy can not only alleviate the symptoms, but also makes a strong contribution to prevention and long-term gout management.

Orthomolecular Medicine

Orthomolecular medicine relies on the supplementation of vitamins, minerals and micronutrients to support the metabolism and reduce the risk of gout attacks. The focus is on Vitamin C because it promotes uric acid excretion via the kidneys. Studies show that a regular intake of Vitamin C is associated with a lower uric acid level. Omega-3 fatty acids, such as those found in fatty fish or algae oil, also have an anti-inflammatory effect and can have a positive influence on joint pain. Zinc, selenium and magnesium have antioxidant and immunomodulating properties. Selection and dosage should be made individually.

Therapeutic Exercise

Regular physical activity helps to reduce excess weight, promotes the metabolism and the excretion of uric acid. Joint-friendly sports such as swimming, cycling or walking should be preferred so as not to put additional strain on the joints. Gymnastics, yoga or moderate strength training also maintain mobility and strengthen the muscles. During an acute gout attack, rest is advised, because exercise increases the pain. In symptom-free phases, exercise makes sense to reduce the risk of further attacks and promote general health. It is important to pay attention to the body's signals and slowly increase the training.

Mind-Body Methods

Mind-body methods aim to bring body and mind into harmony, reduce stress and thus indirectly positively influence the course of the disease. Chronic stress can increase uric acid levels and increase inflammatory processes in the body, which promotes gout attacks. Yoga combines gentle movement, stretching and relaxation, promotes joint mobility and makes it easier to deal with pain. Meditation and mindfulness exercises help to calm the mind, reduce stress and increase well-being. Breathing techniques such as deep abdominal breathing or progressive muscle relaxation support physical and mental relaxation. Autogenic training or guided imaginations also help to find inner peace and influence the perception of pain.

Conclusion

Gout is a complex disease of civilization, the development of which is closely linked to our modern lifestyle and genetic factors. Basic conventional medical therapy offers effective possibilities to alleviate acute symptoms and control uric acid levels in the long term. Complementary medical approaches can meaningfully complement treatment and increase well-being. Studies show that consistent lifestyle changes – especially weight reduction, a low-purine diet and regular exercise – significantly reduce the risk of gout attacks. Vitamin C and Omega-3 fatty acids are also intensively discussed as supportive measures in current studies. The outlook for people with gout is positive if they are willing to adapt their lifestyle habits and implement the therapy consistently. An interdisciplinary approach that combines conventional medical knowledge and complementary procedures offers the best chances for successful gout therapy and a high quality of life.

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