

Patient Patient

With **MARTY DICKINSON**



Q When did you first realize you had gout?

For four years, I was in denial that I even had gout. It first started when I was a coach for a youth sports team. Short warm-up jogs with my team would trigger flares. Then pain in my ankles would keep me up all night. My primary care doctor suggested I might have gout, but I didn't want to hear it. I listened instead to other doctors, who said I might have a sprained ankle or loose tendons.

Finally, my pain got too extreme, and I had to admit that something was wrong. I finally came to terms with my primary care doctor's diagnosis: gout. And I decided to seek treatment.

Q How has gout impacted your daily life?

For 15 years I used public speaking to build my small business. Then my gout flares became worse and more frequent. I was exhausted and

immobilized by nights without sleep. I didn't want to go up on stage on crutches, so I basically had to stop public speaking. My business suffered as a result.

Gout flares also impacted my family, my relationships and my social life. It was debilitating.

Q Did you have misconceptions about gout?

I thought I was way too young. I realize now that I could've had symptoms of gout as early as high school. I remember that my knee would always swell after martial arts classes.

I thought gout was only for people who are obese and do not exercise. Because I'm active and don't eat or drink anything to excess, I never imagined I would get gout.

Q What was the turning point for you?

I was on a family vacation, a cruise. Before we even stepped on the boat, I could feel a gout flare coming on. Sure enough, I had an attack our first day. While my family went on shore excursions, I stayed on the boat trying to get my attack under control. My souvenir from the cruise was a pair of crutches.

That's when I decided it was time to treat my gout. I made an appointment with my doctor and started taking colchicine and allopurinol. It took about four months to get the dosages right, but I finally got my gout under control.

Q What has helped you manage your gout?

Nothing worked until I started taking medication and I got my uric acid levels under control. Since then, I've gone three years without a serious flare.

Throughout the process of finding what works to manage my gout, I discovered the importance of exercise. I started by simply using heat to increase mobility in my joints. Eventually I worked up strength to start going to the gym for light exercise. Now I exercise every day to assure increased blood flow to my joints.

Q What advice would you offer someone struggling with gout?

Don't let it go as far as I did. Don't let it go so far as to ruin your career or hurt your relationships. Get your gout under control early.

If possible, medication should be on the forefront of your treatment. Dietary and lifestyle changes can certainly help, but it's important to work with your health care provider to get your symptoms under control and manage your uric acid levels so you're able to get back to normal life.

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