

Health



Dr Anoop Kuttikat

How to cut down risk of gout attacks

Gout is an extremely painful type of arthritis that can show up suddenly. Most commonly, it presents as painful, red hot swelling of the big toe. It can also affect other joints of the feet, ankles, knees and wrists. A typical attack lasts for up to a week; many get recurrent attacks.

Many still think of gout as “the disease of kings” due to its association with opulent lifestyles with excess of wine and meat. In reality, it is common in the general western population, affecting one in 40.

Gout is mostly a man’s condition, though women can be affected too. It is caused by a build-up of excess uric acid that settles as needle-shaped crystals in the joints.

Gout is diagnosed by your GP based on your symptoms, an examination and blood tests. If possible, draining of the fluid from the affected joint, to look under a microscope for uric acid crystals, is recommended. Your GP may also refer you to a consultant rheumatologist for expert advice.

Anti-inflammatory tablets, colchicine and steroids are all effective in treating gout attacks. Your GP will recommend the best option for you. Steroid injection directly into the affected joint can also be very beneficial.

Medications to reduce the uric acid levels are recommended to reduce the risk of future attacks.

There are things you can do on your own to reduce risk of gout attacks. If you are overweight, losing weight can help.

Make dietary changes: cut down on red meat and seafood, reduce alcohol intake and avoid cookies and sodas with high-fructose corn syrup. Instead, eat lots of fruit, vegetables, nuts and legumes – such as peas, beans and lentils – low-fat dairy products and whole grains.

Some people with gout have other medical problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease and kidney disease. It is important to work with the GP to get these issues under control as well to improve overall health.

The good news is that a combination of medications and dietary changes can eliminate gout attacks completely in more than 90 per cent of patients.

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The Duchess of Cambridge at Each in Quidenham in January

Picture: East Anglia’s Children’s Hospices



Children’s hospice staff have a duchess fighting their corner

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The Duchess of Cambridge has praised the “extraordinary” work of “dedicated staff and volunteers” at children’s hospices across the country.

To mark the beginning of Children’s Hospice Week, Kate, a patron of East Anglia’s Children’s Hospices (Each), released a personal video to show her support on Monday “They deliver first-class care in a safe environment that feels as close to home as possible, full of colour, warmth, love and support,” she said.

“Today, as we mark the beginning of Children’s Hospice Week, I hope you will join me in shining a light on the dedicated and inspirational staff

“*The work they do is extraordinary, and it really does make a world of difference*

The Duchess of Cambridge

and volunteers, and the lifeline services they provide for children and their families.

“The work they do is extraordinary, and it really does make a world of difference.”

The *Cambridge Independent* has launched a campaign alongside Each to raise £87,500 to establish Each’s Help at Home service which will provide support to Cambridgeshire families.

Children’s Hospice Week, which

runs from May 22 to 28, is organised by the UK charity Together For Short Lives.

Graham Butland, Each chief executive, said: “Children’s Hospice Week is a key date in our calendar:

“It’s an opportunity to shine a light on the number and complex needs of children and young people with life-threatening conditions as well as the range of services that support them.

“As we rely heavily on public support, this is also an opportunity to share with our supporters just how much we value their help and what a difference it makes to local families accessing our services. We hope that people will join us during May 22-28 and get involved by raising money and also awareness of children’s palliative care services.”

Her message was recorded on a

visit to meet children and families at Each in Quidenham in January this year. In her recording, the Duchess highlighted that across the UK there are more than 49,000 children and young people with life-limiting conditions.

“For any parent being told that your child may have a life-limiting condition or may die young will be one of the most difficult and isolating experiences you can face,” she said.

“Having someone to help you come to terms with this news and the professional support and care that comes with this can make an enormous difference. It can help families make the most of every precious moment they have together.”

■ Donate at uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fund/helpathome.

Could over-active immune system trigger depression?

Cambridge researchers are exploring whether some cases of depression could be triggered by an overactive immune system.

About one-third of depressed patients have consistently high levels of inflammation, which is a complex process used by the immune system to help ward off infection.

Leading the study is Prof Ed Bullmore, head of the

Department of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge and director of research and development at Cambridge and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust, who said: “Depression and inflammation often go hand in hand. If you have ‘flu, the immune system reacts to that, you become inflamed and very often people find that their mood changes too. Their

behaviour changes, they may become less sociable, more sleepy, more withdrawn. They may begin to have some of the negative ways of thinking that are characteristic of depression and all of that follows an infection.

“If we can identify the biomarkers that will allow us to predict which patients with depression are most likely to

respond to anti-inflammatory drugs, the good news is that there is a lot of those types of drugs already available that might turn out to be effective anti-depressants. That could mean new treatments for a condition that affects 300 million people worldwide.”

Six other universities and two pharmaceutical companies are also involved in the work.