



GOUT ARTHRITIS IN NEW ZEALAND

What is gout arthritis?

Gout arthritis is a very painful form of arthritis that can be debilitating and have a severe impact on the quality of life. Gout arthritis is caused by too much uric acid in the blood that crystallises and forms very painful lumps on the elbows, hands, and feet. It is **not** caused by food and drink. Untreated gout arthritis can cause permanent damage to joints and kidneys.

Who has gout arthritis?

Gout arthritis disproportionately affects men and Māori and Pacific Peoples, who have up to four times the gout incidence of non-Māori or non-Pacific Peoples in New Zealand. Genetic differences between Māori and Pacific Peoples and others contribute significantly to these high rates. Thousands of young Māori and Pacifica men have gout. Overall, Māori and Pacific Peoples receive less effective treatment for gout than other ethnicities. They have four times (Māori) to nine times (Pacific) as many hospital admissions due to gout arthritis than other groups.

How gout arthritis impacts on individuals, whanau and society

People with gout arthritis

- present at emergency departments of hospitals with intense pain
- may require operations to manage damage to their joints
- are less able to maintain a healthy weight due to loss of mobility
- take time off work, and if gout is severe, require financial support from others, including the Government.

What is the solution

With **appropriate**, inexpensive medication to **reduce uric acid levels**, those with Gout arthritis can return to a normal productive life.

Medication is the most effective way of avoiding complications and painful flare-ups. Allopurinol is a medicine that works for most people and is already subsidised by PHARMAC. Gout arthritis is not cured even when the pain goes away. Medication is needed long term. It can take months to establish a stable medication regime. Patients need support to stay on the programme. Busy GPs and pharmacists are not always able to provide supportive follow-up. Community-based organisations and whanau ora workers can play an important role, as can buddy support and support groups. Gout is associated with increased risk of depression, and the use of **appropriate** gout medication reduces this risk.

Arthritis New Zealand hears many stories about poor diagnosis and undertreatment. Official statistics back this up. Better knowledge is needed in communities and among services providers that gout is treatable.

Repeat visits to GPs are not affordable for some. Time-off work is difficult to arrange, along with transport. One way to reduce cost is to broaden the range of people that can prescribe medication and to lengthen the time the prescription covers once a regime is stable. It would help if clinics could be provided after normal working hours.

Question from Arthritis New Zealand

- Will your Party support the development of a national plan to improve treatment and on-going management of gout arthritis and require District health Boards or their equivalents to report on progress against this plan?