Kevan Christie: Careful diet can keep excruciating pain of gout at bay

KEVAN CHRISTIE

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A careful diet can keep the excruciating pain of gout at bay says Kevan Christie

Among the myriad national awareness days, weeks and months, competing with each other to make us even more health conscious, one stood out like a sore toe. National Gout Day on 22 May strikes a chord with this health reporter having cruelly succumbed to the agony of the swollen joint as a fresh-faced 23-year-old. The pain of gout is not something to be taken lightly with sudden attacks of severe swelling. It can come out of the blue and leave the sufferer confused and concerned as to what is going on. I remember like it was yesterday, waking up on the couch after a hard night’s drinking and wondering how I had broken my big toe on the way home from Buster Brown’s discotheque - via the kebab shop. Fast-forward 25 years and I’m still taking a daily dose of allopurinol to keep my levels of uric acid in check. Not a lot of people know that gout is a type of arthritis in which tiny crystals form inside and around the joints. Although the condition mainly affects men over 30 and women after the menopause, overall gout is more common in men than women. Once associated with rich living and a diet of port and ripe stilton, a host of famous people including King Henry VIII have suffered with the condition - the monarch being the principle reason gout was known as the “disease of kings”. My own personal weakness was a fish supper with a smoked sausage chaser. That didn’t help one’s waistline or big toe. Other notable sufferers include the poet John Milton who wrote his magnun-opus Paradise Lost while tormented with gout and the Hollywood actor Jared Leto who ended up in a wheelchair after gaining 60lbs playing the role of Mark David Chapman, the deranged killer of John Lennon. Nowadays, more is being done to look at what measures can be taken to alleviate the chances of getting gout through lifestyle and diet. Being overweight increases the risk of developing gout, with research suggesting reducing the number of calories lowers uric acid levels and subsequently reduces the number of attacks. Drinking lots of water is important, with recommended levels of eight to 16 glasses of non-alcoholic fluids a day. Certain foods have always been off-limits and increase the risk of a recurrence in the unfortunate victim. Rich organ and glandular meats, like liver, kidney and sweetbreads are off the menu, if you’d ever eat them - as are selected seafood like sardines, tuna and mussels which are higher in purines than others. Predictably, alcohol is perceived as a common cause of gout with the metabolism of it in your body thought to increase uric acid production and alcohol contributes to dehydration - a factor in gout. The not always incorrect perception that gout sufferers may like a pint or five has conspired to make then the butt of jokes but the pain is no laughing matter. I know of one terminally-ill man whose principal concern was getting his prescription so his gout didn’t return. True story. Once the gout strikes, the sufferer inevitably reaches for the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) which have been in the news recently over increased risk of heart attack and stroke. One of the most effective is naproxen which can be found in common period pain tablets. So if you’re overweight and like a few drinks to wash down your fish supper - watch out, gout may be in the post  
  
Read more at: http://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/kevan-christie-careful-diet-can-keep-excruciating-pain-of-gout-at-bay-1-4448963