

YOUR GOUT QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Gout & Hispanic Communities



Perspective from **PALOMA ALEJANDRO-SILVA, MD**

How common is gout among Hispanics?

I would say gout is more common in Hispanic communities than we imagine. I'm confident that, at least in Puerto Rico, gout affects more than 3% of the population. I see it disproportionately affect young patients here, people in their 20s and 30s. But there have been few, if any, major studies on gout and Hispanic communities. We need more research, which could help us improve outcomes for Hispanic patients with gout.

What are some commonalities among your patients?

Two major commonalities among my Hispanic gout patients concern me: noncompliance with office visits and nonadherence to medication. A number of my patients don't see me as often as they should. When they do come to appointments, I often hear that they also haven't been keeping up with their medications. To support my patients, I always encourage them to ask questions and take gout seriously by proactively treating the disease.

What misconceptions about gout do you see in Hispanic communities?

My patients often think that gout isn't a chronic disease. That's simply not true. Many patients have one gout attack, get medication that provides short-term relief, and then stop pursuing treatment because they think they've solved the problem. This leaves them susceptible to more frequent and more severe flares.

What unique environmental factors do Hispanic communities face?

Hispanic patients should be mindful of the role diet plays. Hispanics tend to have diets rich in fatty foods and foods with high levels of fructose. These are triggers for gout flares. In Puerto Rico, alcohol consumption is also more commonplace. Alcohol is a significant factor in developing gout and having gout flares. With Puerto Rico being an

island community, healthier food options tend to be pricier – so there're also access issues related to diet. While diet isn't everything, eating healthy and avoiding triggers can support gout management.

What treatment barriers do Hispanic communities face?

Many patients seek short-term gout treatments in the emergency room or with primary care providers. Either way, patients often don't get to the underlying causes of their gout. Getting proper treatment depends on providers recognizing patients' symptoms as indicators of gout. That doesn't always happen, especially for first-time visits. Misinterpreting symptoms can delay patients' access to specialists, prolonging their pain. Patients shouldn't be afraid to advocate for themselves or ask for a second opinion if needed. Treatment can also be delayed because of insurance coverage issues. Many insurers are slow to cover ongoing treatments for gout. Fighting for coverage can feel like swimming against a current, though we continue to work to make access easier.

What can be done to eliminate these barriers?

We can develop education efforts targeted at patients and emergency and primary care providers. Helping these groups better understand and identify gout can get patients into a specialist's office faster. Insurers could also do their part to alleviate patients' gout pains by expanding coverage for medications that treat gout as a chronic condition.

Why is proper treatment for gout so critical?

If patients don't get proper treatment for gout, they can become disabled. They can also develop other health complications: coronary artery disease, stroke, kidney failure. Altogether, these conditions can significantly limit patients' daily activities and even endanger their lives. Patients can get control over their gout by talking with their care providers, adhering to their medications and keeping to a healthier diet.