

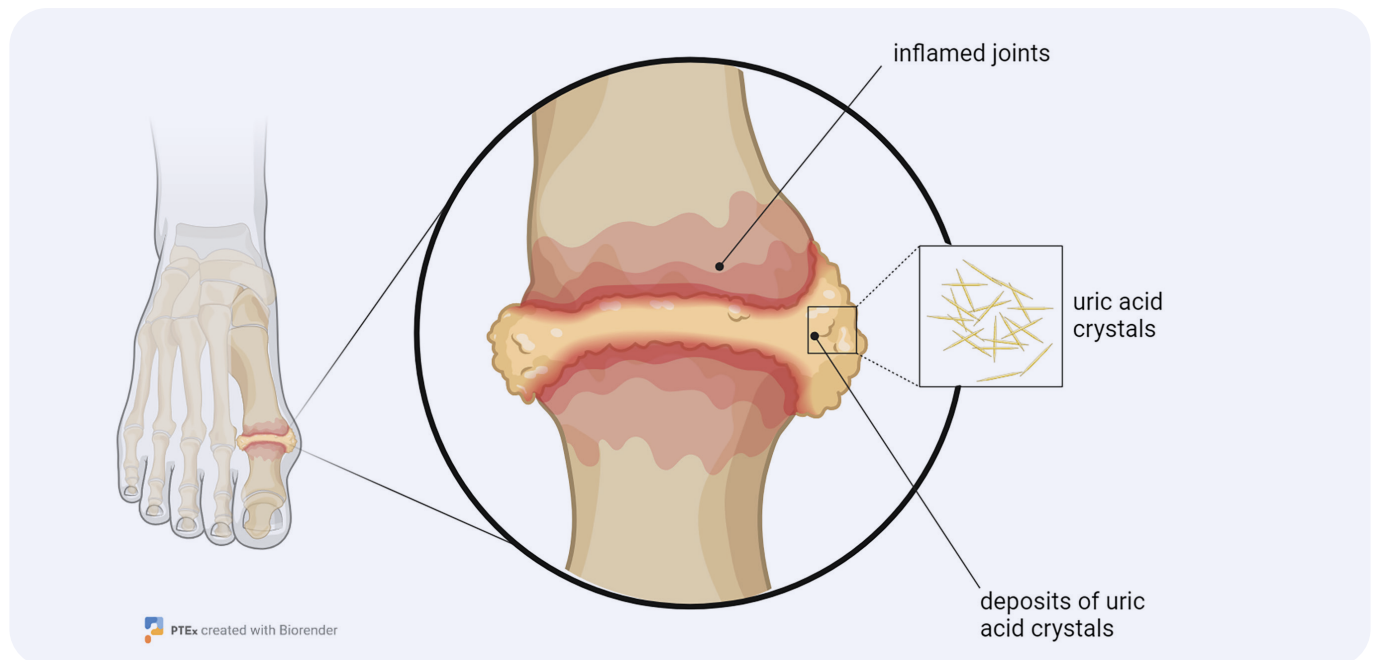


# PATHOLOGY TESTS EXPLAINED

Information about pathology tests to help everyone take control of their health and make the right decisions about their care.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT **YOUR URIC ACID TEST**

Uric acid is a waste product that your body makes when it breaks down chemicals called purines. Most purines come from your cells when they die as part of their natural lifecycle. Purines also come from food, especially sugary drinks, and sweets – due to high fructose – as well as red meat, liver and kidney meat, certain seafoods and alcohol.



### How uric acid collects in the joints and causes gout

The kidneys filter uric acid out of your blood, and it is passed into your urine to be removed. If you are producing too much uric acid or if your kidneys are not working well, it can build up in your body and form needle-shaped crystals in the fluid around your joints, which causes inflammation. This is a type of arthritis called gout.

Gout usually affects only one or two joints at the same time, typically in the feet and ankles. An attack usually happens at night, causing severe pain and swelling. The pain usually peaks after 12 to 24 hours, then slowly subsides. It often occurs in the big toe, and people can notice it when their bedding rubs on their toe and causes extreme pain. Without treatment, an early attack of gout usually goes away in about a week, and it may be months or years before the next one. As time goes by, more joints can be affected and become chronically swollen.



### Testing

The test measures the amount of uric acid in a sample of your blood or urine to find out whether your body might be breaking down cells too quickly or not removing uric acid quickly enough. Testing can also be used to help assess your risk of developing kidney stones as caused by high levels of uric acid.

Uric acid testing is also used to monitor chemotherapy or radiation therapy for cancer. These treatments work by killing cells with the result that more purines are released into the blood. Uric acid levels can also rise in pre-eclampsia and are sometimes measured during pregnancy.



## What can your results show?

Higher than normal uric acid levels mean that your body is not handling the breakdown of purines well. Your medical team will have to find out whether the cause is over-production of uric acid, increased intake of purine-rich food, or if your body is unable to remove the uric acid because your kidneys are not working properly.

Uric acid levels can vary throughout day and from week to week and there has been some discussion about the exact limits of what constitutes a normal test result for uric acid because there is such a wide range of normal results. Your doctors may request several uric acid tests over a period of time to get a clearer idea of your levels.

Depending on the condition that causes your high uric acid levels, you may not need to take medication. For some people lifestyle changes are all that is needed with weight loss, if required, and a change in eating habits by moving to a healthier Mediterranean or DASH diet. If you have a sudden spike in uric acid level, as with an attack of gout, your doctors may treat you with colchicine and a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug, such as aspirin or ibuprofen. This treatment usually is short term.

However, you may have to stay on a maintenance therapy for a while until your uric acid levels come under control. You may be given drugs such as probenecid that help to clear your system of uric acid salts or you may be given drugs such as allopurinol that interfere with uric acid production.



## Having a medical test

The choice of tests your doctor makes is based on your medical history and symptoms. Make sure you tell them everything you think might help. You play a central role in making sure your test results are accurate. Do everything you can to make sure the information you provide is correct.



### Questions to ask your doctor

- Why does this test need to be done?
- Do I need to prepare (such as fast or avoid medications) for the sample collection?
- Will an abnormal result mean I need further tests?
- How could it change the course of my care?
- What will happen next, after the test?

For more detailed information on these and many other tests go to [pathologytestsexplained.org.au](http://pathologytestsexplained.org.au)



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[www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au](http://www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au)

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Pathology Tests Explained is managed by a consortium of medical and scientific organisations representing pathology practice in Australia. More details at: [www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au/about](http://www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au/about)



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### My Health Record

You'll find a direct link to the Pathology Tests Explained website embedded in the pathology results pages of your My Health Record.

Click on the link to find information about what your tests are investigating or measuring and what your results can tell your doctor.