

Ben Franklin, King Henry VIII and I share something in common. And unfortunately it's not something good. I had a pain in my left ankle on Wednesday that caused me to limp yesterday and by this morning I was unable to put any weight on my foot. Went to the see the doctor and it turns out I've had my first case of gout - a kind of arthritis that's been around since ancient times.

Flares of gout are caused by inflammation when needle-like crystals are deposited in connective tissue and/or in the fluid that cushions a joint (the synovial fluid). These crystals are made up of uric acid, a substance produced when the body breaks down purines found in human tissue and many foods we eat. Most uric acid is carried through the bloodstream to the kidneys, which eliminate it from the body in the urine. However, if the body produces too much uric acid or if the kidneys don't eliminate enough of it, uric acid can build up in the blood.

An attack usually starts with sudden, severe pain, tenderness, redness, warmth, and swelling in the large joint of the big toe. Other joints may include the instep, ankles, heels, knees, wrists, fingers, and elbows. Rarely, the shoulders, hips, or spine may be affected. After about 3-10 days, the attack usually subsides, and the next one may not happen for months or even years. But over time, the gout attacks can become more severe, last longer, affect more than one joint, and occur more often.

Not what I wanted to hear obviously. Doctor gave me some anti-inflammatories which helped reduce the swelling over the weekend but I sure do hope this is not going to become a regular occurrence as I get older.