

# Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis

## General Information About Diverticular Disease

Most people have small pouches that bulge outward in their colons. Each pouch is called a diverticulum.

- Diverticulosis occurs when the small pouches (called diverticula) bulge out through weak spots in the colon.
- Diverticulitis occurs when the pouches become infected or inflamed.

Together, these conditions are known as diverticular disease.

A low-fiber diet is the main cause of diverticular disease. Fiber is the part of fruits, vegetables and grains that your body can't digest. Fiber helps prevent constipation, which makes your colon muscles strain to move stool that is too hard. This causes increased pressure in your colon. This extra pressure causes weak spots in your colon to bulge and become diverticula.

## Symptoms of Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis

- **Diverticulosis** does not usually cause discomfort or symptoms. It can cause mild cramps, bloating and constipation. Other diseases (such as irritable bowel syndrome and stomach ulcers) can cause similar problems.
- **Diverticulitis** occurs when diverticula become infected or inflamed. With this, you will have abdominal pain and tenderness around the left side of your lower abdomen.

If an infection caused the diverticulitis, you may also have fever, nausea, vomiting, chills, cramping and constipation. Diverticulitis can occur suddenly without warning. It can lead to infections, tears, blockages or bleeding.

## How a Diverticular Disease is Confirmed

To confirm a diverticular disease, your health care provider will ask for your medical history, give you a physical exam (including a rectal exam) and may do certain tests such as a barium enema, flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy. Your health care provider may also want to do imaging tests such as a CT scan.

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## How to Treat a Diverticular Disease

A high-fiber diet and mild pain medicines will most often help relieve your symptoms.

- **Diverticulosis:** Increase the amount of fiber you eat. Fiber keeps your stools soft and lowers the pressure inside your colon. Good sources of fiber include fruits, vegetables and whole-grain breads and cereals. Your health care provider may also recommend drinking a fiber product once a day. If you have cramps, bloating and constipation, your health care provider may prescribe pain medicine.
- **Diverticulitis:** Your health care provider will likely prescribe an antibiotic (medicine). You may also be asked to be on bed rest, follow a liquid diet and take a medicine to control muscle spasms in your colon. You may need to stay in the hospital if your diverticulitis causes severe pain or infection. Sometimes an abscess (collection of pus in your abdomen) forms because of a ruptured diverticulum and must be drained.

## When Surgery Would Be Needed

Your health care provider may suggest surgery if your attacks are severe or occur often.

During a colon resection surgery, your surgeon opens your abdomen and removes the affected part of your colon. The sections of colon that are left are then reconnected. This surgery is done to prevent future symptoms.

Emergency surgery would be needed if antibiotics don't work or if you have a large abscess (collection of pus in your abdomen), abdominal tear, peritonitis (inflammation of the membrane on your abdominal wall) or continued bleeding.

- In the first surgery, the surgeon makes a temporary hole (stoma) in your abdomen. The end of the colon is connected to the hole during a colostomy. Your stool goes into a bag which is attached to the opening in your abdomen.
- In the second surgery, the surgeon reconnects the ends of your colon.

**Information adapted from the  
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive  
and Kidney Diseases.**