

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.

Doctors believe 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 doctor will ask for your medical history, give you a physical exam (including a rectal exam) and may do certain tests (such as X-rays).

How to Treat a Diverticular Disease

A high-fiber diet and mild pain medicines will most often help relieve the 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 doctor may also recommend drinking a fiber product (such as Citrucel® or Metamucil®) once a day.

If you have cramps, bloating and constipation, your doctor may prescribe pain medicine.

- **Diverticulitis:** Your doctor will likely prescribe an antibiotic (medicine). He or she may also recommend bed rest, a liquid diet and a medicine to control muscle spasms in your colon. You may need to stay in the hospital if your attack of diverticulitis causes severe pain or severe infection.

When Surgery Would be Needed

Your doctor may suggest surgery if your attacks are severe or occur often. During a colon resection surgery, the doctor opens your abdomen and removes the affected part of your colon. The sections of colon that are left are rejoined. This surgery is designed to keep attacks from coming back.

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

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