

Care Gram

Diverticular Disease

What Is Diverticular Disease?

Diverticular disease is diverticulosis or diverticulitis. These are diseases of the colon (large intestine).

Many people have small pouches in their colons that stick out through weak spots. This is like an inner tube that pokes through weak places in a tire. Multiple pouches are called diverticula. When the pouches swell or become infected, it is called diverticulitis.

Diverticulosis

The cause is not known. It may be from a low-fiber diet. Fiber helps make stools soft and easy to pass. Fiber also prevents constipation. Constipation makes the muscle strain to move stool that is too hard. This can make the weak spots in the colon bulge out (diverticula).

Symptoms

Some people have no symptoms. Others have symptoms of:

- Mild cramps
- Bloating
- Constipation (hard bowel movements)

Other health problems can cause these symptoms too. Visit your doctor if you have these symptoms.

Treatment

1. A high-fiber diet – this helps decrease symptoms and prevent diverticulitis
2. Mild pain medications
3. Hospital stay, if needed
4. Possibly surgery

High-fiber Diet

- You should eat 20 to 35 grams of fiber each day as recommended by The American Dietetic Association. Fiber is found in many products, such as plant-based foods that are not processed.
- Some foods high in fiber are whole-grain breads and cereals, oatmeal, brown rice, carrots, broccoli, spinach, peas, potatoes, beans, apples, pears, and dried fruit.



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- Some foods work better for some people. Write down what you eat for each meal. Keep track of foods that cause problems and those foods that work well for you.
- Slowly increase the fiber in your diet – too much fiber added quickly may cause gas, cramping, bloating, or diarrhea. This occurs because your body is not used to extreme changes in diet.
- Drink plenty of water – at least 8 cups of water a day.
- Ask your doctor if you should add a fiber product to your diet, such as Citrucel or Metamucil.

Diverticulitis

This is when the pouches in the colon become infected or inflamed. It happens in 10 to 25 percent of people with diverticulosis. It may begin when stool or bacteria are caught in the diverticula. An attack can happen quickly and without warning.

Symptoms

- Abdominal pain
- Soreness around the left side of the lower abdomen

Infection symptoms include:

- Fever/chills
- Nausea/vomiting
- Cramping
- Constipation – hard bowel movements

Treatment

1. Clear up the infection – with antibiotics
2. Rest the colon – bed rest, a liquid diet, and pain medicine
3. Diet changes – you may need to be on a liquid diet for a few days
 - When your doctor says that you can start solid foods, you may need to limit the amount of fiber in your diet for a short time (fiber-restrictive diet – this lets the bowel rest until your symptoms get better)
 - A fiber-restrictive diet would include highly refined breads, pasta, cereal, rice, canned fruits, and cooked vegetables (low-gas causing)
 - Add fiber slowly to your diet as your symptoms go away
4. Surgery – may be needed if you have:
 - Repeat attacks of diverticulitis
 - Small holes in the diverticula (perforation)
 - A tube-like passage between organs (fistula)
 - An infected area (abscess)

For more help with your diet, ask your doctor to make a referral for you to visit a dietitian.