

## What Is Diverticul-osis?

Some people have in their colons small pouches that bulge outward through weak spots, like an inner tube that pokes through weak places in a tire. Each pouch is called a diverticulum. Pouches are diverticula. The condition of having diverticula is called diverticulosis. About half of all Americans age 60 to 80, and almost everyone over age 80, have diverticulosis.

## What Is Diverticul-itis?

When the pouches (as described above) become infected or inflamed, the condition is called diverticulitis. This happens in 10 to 25 percent of people with diverticulosis. Diverticulosis and diverticulitis are also called diverticular disease.

### What Causes Diverticular Disease?

Doctors believe a **low-fiber diet** is the main cause of diverticular disease.

Fiber is a part of fruits, vegetables and grains that the body cannot digest. Some fiber dissolves easily in water (soluble fiber). It takes on a soft, jelly-like texture in the intestines. Some fiber passes almost unchanged through the intestines (insoluble fiber). Both kinds of fiber help make stools soft and easy to pass. Fiber also prevents constipation.

Constipation makes the muscles strain to move stool that is too hard. It is the main cause of increased pressure which causes the weak spots in the colon to bulge out and become diverticula.

Diverticulitis occurs when diverticula become infected or inflamed. Doctors are not certain what causes the infection. It may begin when stool or bacteria are caught in the diverticula. An attack of diverticulitis can develop suddenly and without warning.

### What Are the Symptoms of Diverticulosis?

Most people with diverticulosis do not have any discomfort or symptoms. However, symptoms may include mild cramps, bloating and constipation. Other diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and stomach ulcers cause similar problems, so these symptoms do not always mean a person has diverticulosis. You should visit your doctor if you have these troubling symptoms.

### What Are the Symptoms of Diverticulitis?

The most common symptom of diverticulitis is abdominal pain. The most common sign is tenderness around the left side of the lower abdomen. If infection is the cause, fever, nausea, vomiting, chills, cramping and constipation may occur as well. The severity of symptoms depends on the extent of the infection and complications. Complications may include bleeding, abscess, perforation, peritonitis, fistula and intestinal obstruction.

### How Is Diverticular Disease Diagnosed?

To diagnose diverticular disease, the doctor asks about medical history, does a physical exam, and may perform one or more diagnostic tests. Because most people do not have symptoms, diverticulosis is often found through tests ordered for another ailment.

### What Is The Treatment For Diverticulosis?

Increasing the amount of fiber in the diet will not make diverticula go away, but it may prevent further diverticula from forming, reduce symptoms of diverticulosis and prevent complications such as diverticulitis. Fiber keeps stool soft and lowers pressure inside the colon so that bowel contents can move through easily. The American Dietetic Association recommends 25 to 35 grams of fiber each day. It is also important to drink plenty of water.

The doctor may also recommend drinking a fiber product such as Citrucel or Metamucil once a day. These products are mixed with water and provide about 4 to 6 grams of fiber for an 8-ounce glass. This, however, does not replace the need for obtaining fiber from foods.

If cramps, bloating and constipation are problems, the doctor may prescribe a short course of pain medication. However, many medications cause constipation, an undesirable side effect for people with diverticulosis.

### What Is The Treatment For Diverticulitis?

Treatment for diverticulitis focuses on clearing up the infection and inflammation, resting the colon and preventing or minimizing complications. An attack of diverticulitis without complications may respond to antibiotics within a few days if treated early.

To help the colon rest, the doctor may recommend bed rest and a liquid diet, along with a pain reliever or a drug to control muscle spasms in the colon.

An acute attack with severe pain or severe infection may require a hospital stay. Most acute cases of diverticulitis are treated with antibiotics and a liquid diet. The antibiotics are given by injection into a vein. In some cases, however, surgery may be necessary.

### Dietary Fiber Content in Common Foods\*

| Food                  | Serving Size | Dietary Fiber (g/serving) |
|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Peas, split           | ½ C          | 8.1                       |
| Lentils, cooked       | ½ C          | 7.8                       |
| Raisin bran           | 1 C          | 7.5                       |
| Shredded wheat        | 2 biscuits   | 5.0                       |
| Wheat bran flakes     | ¾ C          | 4.6                       |
| Figs, dried           | 2 figs       | 4.6                       |
| Kidney beans          | ½ C          | 4.5                       |
| Pear                  | 1 full       | 4.0                       |
| Strawberries, raw     | 1 C, sliced  | 3.8                       |
| Apple, w/skin         | 1 full       | 3.7                       |
| Green peas            | ½ C          | 3.5                       |
| Brown rice, cooked    | 1 C          | 3.5                       |
| Orange                | 1 full       | 3.1                       |
| Prunes, dried         | 5 prunes     | 3.0                       |
| Oatmeal, cooked       | ¾ C          | 3.0                       |
| Banana                | 1 full       | 2.8                       |
| Oat bran muffin       | 1 full       | 2.6                       |
| Mixed nuts, dry roast | 1 oz         | 2.6                       |
| Spinach, cooked       | ½ C          | 2.2                       |
| Brussels sprouts      | ½ C          | 2.0                       |
| Apple pie             | 1 slice      | 1.9                       |
| Bread, whole wheat    | 1 slice      | 1.9                       |
| Carrots, raw          | ½ C          | 1.8                       |
| Chocolate cake        | 1 slice      | 1.8                       |
| Potatoes, boiled      | ½ C          | 1.6                       |

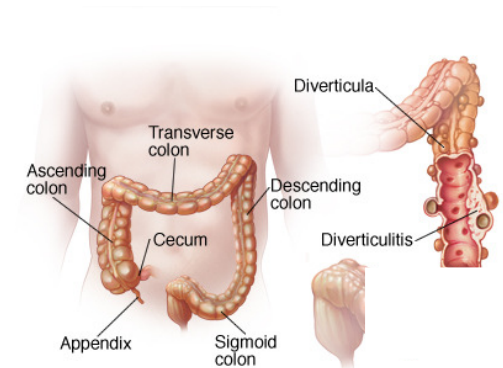
\*According to The American Dietetic Association  
(eatright.org)

**The Center For Special Surgery**  
104 Lincoln Avenue  
Hawthorne, NJ 07506  
973-427-6800  
TheCenterForSpecialSurgery.com

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***An informative  
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