



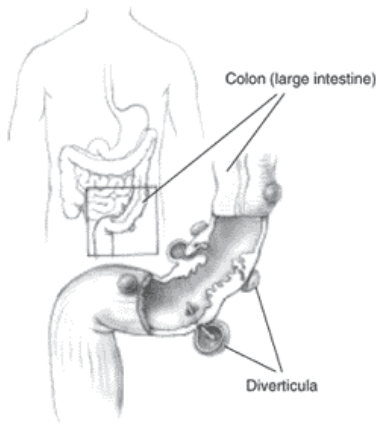
Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis

Patricia L. Raymond, MD FACP FACG

Simply Screening , Total Endoscopic Health & Prevention

Many people have small pouches in their colons 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 (plural) are called diverticula. The condition of having diverticula is called diverticulosis. About 10 percent of Americans over the age of 40 have diverticulosis. The condition becomes more common as people age. About half of all people over the age of 60 have diverticulosis.

When the pouches become infected or inflamed, the condition is called diverticulitis. This happens in 10 to 25 percent of people with diverticulosis.



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 complications of Diverticulosis?

Diverticulitis

Diverticulitis occurs when a diverticulum gets “plugged up” with stool and forms an abscess. The most common symptom of diverticulitis is abdominal pain, tenderness around the left side of the lower abdomen. Fever, nausea, vomiting, chills, cramping, and constipation may occur as well. The severity of symptoms depends on the extent of the infection and complications.

Bleeding

Bleeding from diverticula is a rare complication. When diverticula bleed, sudden large amounts of blood may appear in the toilet or in your stool. Bleeding can be severe. Doctors believe bleeding diverticula are caused by a small blood vessel in a diverticulum that weakens and finally bursts. If you have a large amount of bleeding from the rectum, you should see your doctor immediately or go to the emergency room. If the bleeding does not stop, surgery may be necessary.

Perforation

Sometimes the infected diverticula may develop a hole, called perforation. These perforations allow pus to leak out of the colon into the abdominal area. If an abscess does not clear up with antibiotic, surgery may be necessary.

Intestinal Obstruction

The scarring caused by infection may cause partial or total blockage of the large intestine. When this happens, the colon is unable to move bowel contents normally. If the obstruction totally blocks the intestine, emergency surgery is necessary. Partial blockage is not an emergency, so the surgery to correct it can be planned.

What causes diverticular disease?

Updated 04/06

Although not proven, the dominant theory is that a low-fiber diet is the main cause of diverticular disease. The disease was first noticed in the United States in the early 1900s. At about the same time, processed foods were introduced into the American diet. Many processed foods contain refined, low-fiber flour. Unlike whole-wheat flour, refined flour has no wheat bran.

Diverticular disease is common in developed or industrialized countries—particularly the United States, England, and Australia—where low-fiber diets are common. The disease is rare in countries of Asia and Africa, where people eat high-fiber high-vegetable diets.

What is the treatment for diverticular disease?

Diverticulosis

Increasing the amount of fiber in the diet may 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 20 to 35 grams of fiber each day. The table below shows the amount of fiber in some foods that you can easily add to your diet.

Amount of Fiber in Some Foods			
Fruits		Starchy Vegetables	
Apple, raw with skin	1 medium = 3.3 grams	Baked beans, canned, plain	½ cup = 6.3 grams
Peach, raw	1 medium = 1.5 grams	Kidney beans, fresh, cooked	1/2 cup = 5.7 grams
Pear, raw	1 medium = 5.1 grams	Lima beans, fresh, cooked	1/2 cup = 6.6 grams
Tangerine, raw	1 medium = 1.9 grams	Potato, fresh, cooked	1 = 2.3 grams
Vegetables		Grains	
Asparagus, fresh, cooked	4 spears = 1.2 grams	Bread, whole-wheat	1 slice = 1.9 grams
Broccoli, fresh, cooked	½ cup = 2.6 grams	Brown rice, cooked	1 cup = 3.5 grams
Brussels sprouts, fresh, cooked	½ cup = 2 grams	Cereal, bran flake	¾ cups = 5.3 grams
Cabbage, fresh, cooked	½ cup = 1.5 grams	Oatmeal, plain, cooked	¾ cups = 3 grams
Carrot, fresh, cooked	½ cup = 2.3 grams	White rice, cooked	1 cup = 0.6 grams
Cauliflower, fresh, cooked	½ cup = 1.7 grams		
Romaine lettuce	1 cup = 1.2 grams		
Spinach, fresh, cooked	½ cup = 2.2 grams		
Summer squash, cooked	1 cup = 2.5 grams		
Tomato, raw	1 = 1 gram		
Winter squash, cooked	1 cup = 5.7 grams		
Source: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference Release 15. Available at www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/cgi-bin/nut_search.pl . Accessed April 5, 2004.			

The doctor may also recommend taking a fiber product such as Citrucel or Metamucil once a day. These products are mixed with water and provide about 2 to 3.5 grams of fiber per tablespoon, mixed with 8 ounces of water.

Until recently, many doctors suggested avoiding foods with small seeds such as tomatoes or strawberries because they believed that particles could lodge in the diverticula and cause inflammation. However, it is now generally accepted that only foods that may irritate or get caught in the diverticula cause problems. Foods such as nuts, popcorn hulls, and sunflower, pumpkin, caraway, and sesame seeds should be avoided if they seem to cause your symptoms.

Thanks to National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse, www.nddik.nih.gov

An Educational Service of:
Patricia L. Raymond, MD, FACP, FACG
680 – D Kingsborough Square, Chesapeake, VA 23320
757-54SCOPE (547-2673) fax 757-547-7727

This page is not intended to serve as medical diagnosis or a means to dispense any form of medical advice. It is for information, communication, and educational purposes only. The information is not to be considered complete, nor does it contain all relevant medical information. It is not to be used as a substitute for seeking medical treatment or the appropriate care.