

## DIVERTICULOSIS AND DIVERTICULITIS

Diverticulosis is the presence of abnormal small pouches (*diverticula*) on weak areas of the intestinal wall. There are usually no symptoms. Diverticulitis is the *inflammation* (swelling, tenderness, irritation) of these pouches. The diverticula may be present in any part of the intestine but most occur in the *sigmoid colon*, the lowest section of the large intestine before the rectum. Diverticulosis is common in adults >40, if there is a family history, or if the person follows a low-fiber diet. Constipation may be a contributing factor.

### Symptoms of Diverticulitis *may include*:

- Abdominal pain and tenderness, especially in the lower left side
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Bleeding from the rectum
- Fever and chills

### What *your doctor* can do:

- Diagnose the disease by asking about your symptoms and medical history, performing a physical exam and ordering laboratory tests.
- Perform special X-rays or a colonoscopy (use a long, thin, flexible tube with a light and optics to view and take tissue samples from the colon).

*Treatment will depend on the severity of the disease and may include:*

- For mild cases, a stool softener and liquid diet.
- For more severe cases, it may be necessary to let the colon rest and have an intravenous (IV) line to provide fluids and nutrition for several days to several weeks.
- Prescription medications including antispasmodics, anti-inflammatory meds, and antibiotics
- Surgery may be recommended if the disease is severe, recurrent or to treat complications
- A high-fiber diet is recommended to prevent recurrence. A bulk laxative, such as Metamucil, may also be ordered.

### What *you* can do:

- Take the medicines prescribed by your doctor. Let your doctor know if you are having uncomfortable side effects. Do not stop your medicines without talking to your doctor first.
- Increase fluids (especially water) in your diet to at least 8 glasses a day
- Increase the bulk in your diet with high fiber foods. This includes whole grain breads and cereals, beans and peas, and fresh, raw fruits and vegetables. To prevent abdominal bloating and gas, increase fiber slowly rather than all at once.
- Avoid laxatives other than what your doctor recommends.

*It used to be recommended that patients with diverticulosis avoid nuts. It was believed nuts might block the diverticula (pouch) and cause infection. This theory has since been discredited and avoidance of nuts is no longer necessary.*

### What *you* can expect:

- Most cases are mild and respond to treatment.
- The chance of recurrence is less if a high-fiber diet is followed.
- Possible complications include a tear in the wall of the intestine (*perforation*) or development of a *fistula* (a tube-like passageway). Either situation may cause severe infection or bleeding.

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**Contact your doctor** if symptoms worsen despite treatment or return after treatment, if new symptoms develop, or if you develop fever or severe rectal bleeding.

# DIVERTICULOSIS **PATIENT KEEPS THIS PAPERWORK**

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 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. 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, this is now a controversial point and no evidence supports this recommendation. If cramps, bloating, and constipation are problems, the doctor may prescribe a short course of pain medication. However, many medications affect emptying of the colon, an undesirable side effect for people with diverticulosis.

