

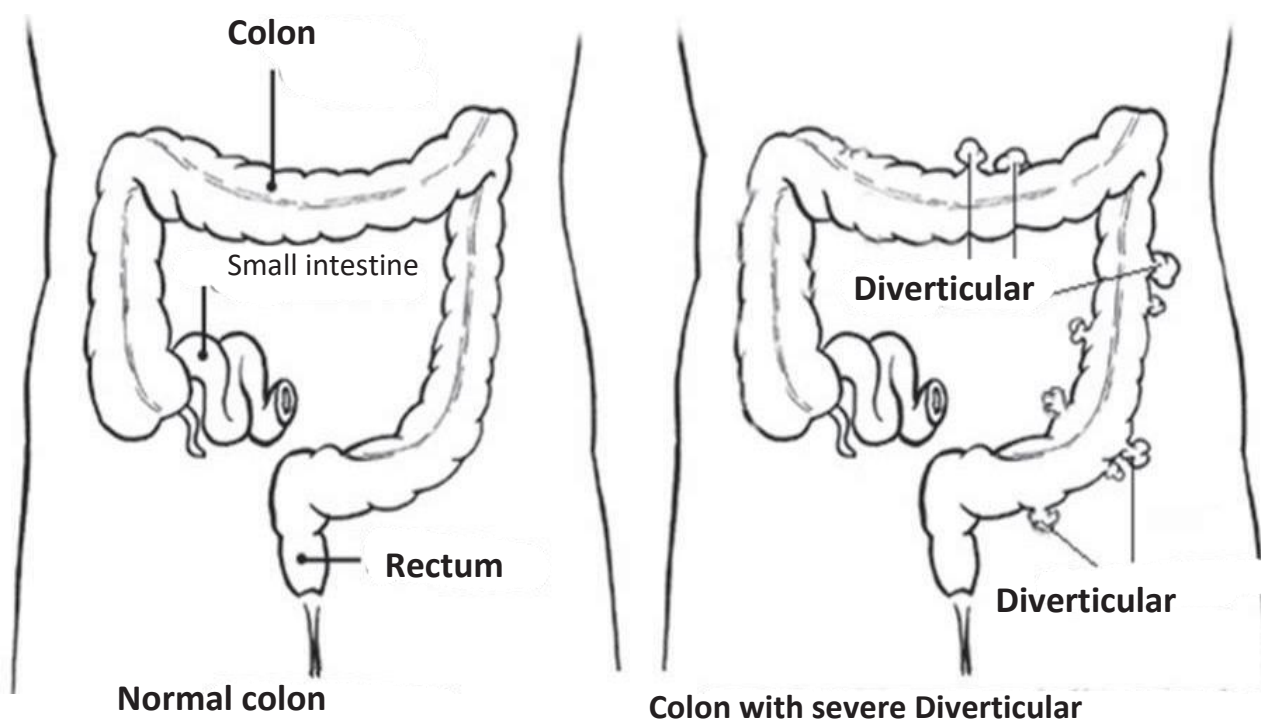
Patient information

Diverticular Disease

Gastroenterology Department

What is diverticular disease?

Diverticular disease develops over time and is very common in people over the age of 50. Small pouches with a narrow neck (diverticulae) develop in the bowel (intestines). They can develop on any part of the gut, but usually occur in the colon (large intestine). They most commonly develop in the section of the colon leading towards the rectum, where the stools are becoming more solid. (This is on the left hand side of the abdomen).



Who gets diverticular disease?

It becomes more common with increasing age and men and women are equally affected.

What causes diverticular disease?

It is related to not eating enough fibre in the diet.

Your bowel muscles have to work harder if there is little fibre in your gut. High pressure may develop in parts of your bowel when it squeezes hard stools.

The increased pressure may push the inner lining of a small area of your gut through the muscle wall to form a small 'hernia' called a diverticulum.

What are the symptoms of diverticular disease?

In some cases, pain in your abdomen and/or bloating may happen. The pain is usually cramp like and tends to come and go. You may get relief from any pain and bloating by going to the toilet to pass stools. Some people develop diarrhoea or constipation.

Are there possible complications of diverticular disease?

Complications are uncommon, and include the following: -

Diverticulitis (infection)

About one in ten people with diverticular disease develop a bout of diverticulitis at some stage. This is when one or more of the diverticula become inflamed and infected.

Symptoms of diverticulitis include:

- A constant pain, usually in the lower left side of the abdomen.
- Fever (high temperature).
- Constipation or diarrhoea.
- You may have some blood mixed with your stools.
- You may feel sick or vomit.

An abscess may develop if the infection is severe.

Diverticulitis is treated with antibiotics and usually settles within a week or so. Admission to hospital is needed in some cases.

Bleeding

Occasionally bleeding can happen and you may pass some blood with your stools. The bleeding is usually slight but may sometimes be heavy.

Obstruction, fistula, and peritonitis

If infection develops it can occasionally lead to a blockage (obstruction) of the gut or form a channel (fistula) to other organs such as the bladder. A diverticulum may, rarely, burst and cause infection inside the abdomen (peritonitis). Surgery is usually needed to treat these serious but uncommon complications.

What is the treatment for diverticular disease?

It is common in older people and can be thought of as a normal part of ageing. No treatment is needed in most cases, as it usually causes no symptoms.

Eat lots of high fibre foods. Fibre helps to make larger and softer stools.

If you have pain due to diverticular disease, you may find that the pain is eased if you eat a high fibre diet. Also, a high fibre diet may prevent further diverticulae forming which may reduce the risk of complications. It also prevents constipation.

Many foods are high in fibre, and include the following:

- Fruit, vegetables, and nuts.
- Wholemeal or wholewheat bread, biscuits, and flour (for baking) .
- Wholegrain breakfast cereals such as All bran, Weetabix, muesli, etc.
- Brown rice, wholemeal spaghetti, and other wholemeal pasta.

You may have some bloating and extra wind at first when you eat more fibre. This is often temporary and tends to settle in a few weeks as your gut becomes used to the extra fibre.

Some experts feel that eating more fibre from fruit and vegetables is probably better than eating more grain based fibre (bread etc) to ease symptoms due to diverticular disease.

- **Fibre supplements** may be advised if a high fibre diet does not prevent constipation. Several are available at pharmacies, health food shops, or on prescription.
- **Have lots to drink** when you have a high fibre diet or fibre supplements. Aim to drink at least two litres (about eight to ten cups) per day.
- **Painkillers** may be needed if you develop abdominal pain. You may be prescribed a medicine to ease gut spasm if you have cramp-like abdominal pains .
- **Antibiotics** may be needed if you develop diverticulitis.

Important

Tell a doctor if you have a sudden change in the pattern of your bowel habit or you pass blood or mucus from your back passage. This may be a sign of a new and different bowel problem.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

For further information please contact

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Review Date: May 2027

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