

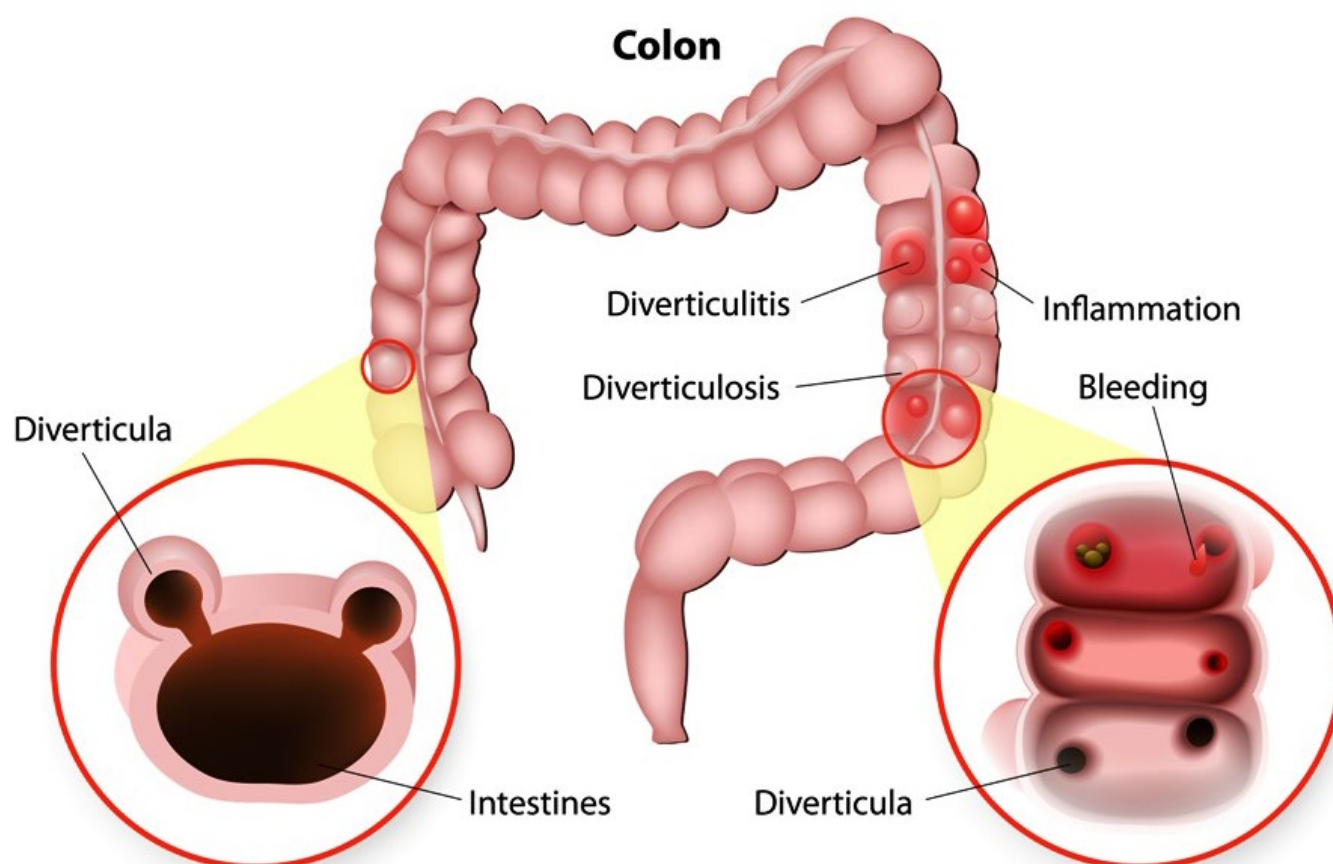
Patient information

Diet and Diverticular Disease

Contact dietitian Telephone.....

This advice sheet gives some general information on the dietary changes you may want to make if you have diverticular disease. If you need more detailed advice or if you are following a special diet that you think may make it difficult or unsafe to make these changes, then please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian

What is diverticular disease?



Common words explained:

Diverticulum	A small pouch (about 1cm in size) which sticks out from the wall of the colon (large intestine).
Diverticula	This refers to more than one diverticulum. The most common site for diverticula to form is on the lower part of the large bowel on the left-hand side. They are permanent unless the affected part of the bowel is surgically removed.
Diverticulitis	The condition that occurs when a single diverticulum or several diverticula become inflamed or infected.
Diverticulosis	The presence of diverticula in the lining of the intestine, without the existence of symptoms. This is not the same as diverticular disease. Most people with diverticulosis do not have, or do not develop, diverticular disease.
Diverticular disease	The occurrence of diverticula which involves presence of symptoms, such as pain in the lower tummy, bloating, change in bowel habit and mucus or blood in the stools.

What causes diverticula?

It is unclear what exactly causes diverticula to develop however certain factors may increase your risk such as:

- Increasing age, usually being 40 years old or older
- Smoking
- Family history of diverticular disease
- Being overweight or obese
- Diet inadequate in fibre
- Having a history of constipation
- Long-term regular use of painkillers such as ibuprofen or aspirin
- Underlying diagnosis of Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, Williams Syndrome, and polycystic kidney disease.

It is likely that 2 in 3 people will develop diverticula during their lifetime.

Symptoms of diverticular disease and diverticulitis

Symptoms of diverticular disease include:

- Tummy (abdomen) pain, usually in your lower left side, that tends to come and go and gets worse during or shortly after eating (which may ease after a stool or wind is passed)
- Bloating
- Change in bowel habit such as constipation, diarrhoea, or both
- Occasionally, mucus or blood in your poo

If your diverticula become infected and inflamed (diverticulitis), you may suddenly:

- Get constant, more severe tummy pain
- Have a high temperature (fever)
- Have diarrhoea or constipation
- Nausea (feeling sick) and/or vomiting (being sick)
- Get mucus or blood in your poo, or bleeding from your bottom (rectal bleeding)

It is important to remember that many symptoms of diverticular disease are very similar to those of more serious conditions such as bowel cancer, inflammatory bowel disease or coeliac disease. If you experience a change in your symptoms or develop new symptoms (see below), ensure to consult your doctor as they may want to rule out other causes.

If you have any of the following symptoms you should speak to your GP:

- Unintentional and unexplained weight loss
- Rectal bleeding
- Blood in stools
- Sudden change in bowel habit
- Nocturnal symptoms

Your symptoms of diverticular disease may also often overlap with conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Therefore, if you are having problems with regards to knowing what to eat or have continuing symptoms of gas, bloating and bowel changes ask you consultant or GP for a referral to a registered dietitian who can provide more individual dietary advice.

What is the treatment of diverticular disease?

It is recommended that patients with diverticular disease eat a healthy, balanced diet including good sources of fibre from wholegrains, fruit and vegetables and ensure having adequate fluid intake. For more information on healthy and balanced diet, see Public Health England's booklet – 'The Eatwell Guide' (see link below).

Current dietary fibre recommendations state that we should all be aiming for at least 30g of fibre each day. A high fibre food product contains at least 6g of fibre per 100g (can be found on the nutritional information on the back of the product).

When introducing fibre into your diet, it is important to do it gradually to help prevent symptoms of bloating and increased wind. You will also need to increase your fluid intake to ensure that you are having between around 2 litres (8 cups) of non-caffeinated fluids per day.

As part of a healthy lifestyle, it is also advised that you perform regular exercise. Alongside good fibre and fluid intake, exercise can help prevent constipation. If you have any other health issues affecting your ability to perform exercise, speak to your GP or Physiotherapist regarding suitable exercises for you to do.

Examples of high fibre foods:

Starchy foods	Wholemeal, brown or granary bread. Oat or rye bread. Chapatti or naan bread made with wholegrain flour. Potato (skin on). Wholegrain crackers, wholegrain rice and wholegrain pasta. Oats or wholegrain breakfast cereals, muesli, Weetabix. Bran-based cereals and shredded wheat, Branflakes.
Fruit	All varieties are suitable including fresh, frozen, dried and canned. 1 portion = 80g / 30g (dried)
Vegetables	All varieties are suitable including fresh, frozen, dried and canned. Vegetable soup. 1 portion = 80g
Protein containing foods	Beans, peas, chickpeas, lentils and dhal. Nuts and seeds.

Puddings and snacks	Puddings containing fruit and dried fruit, oat-based crumble toppings, biscuits containing wholegrain flour. Nuts (nut butters), dried fruit and seeds, flapjack, muesli bars and fruit bars based on dates. Chocolate containing nuts and dried fruit, root vegetable crisps.
Drinks	Fruit juice, smoothies and milk shakes containing the whole fruit. (150ml portion size. Only one portion per day counts as one of your 5 fruit and/or vegetables per day)

What about seeds and nuts?

The latest evidence suggests that there is no need to avoid nuts, corn, popcorn, seeds, tomatoes and fruit with skins and pips (e.g. strawberries, raspberries and blueberries). However, some people may choose to avoid these if they experience symptoms when eating them.

Diet during diverticulitis

Sometimes you may experience a flare-up of diverticular disease, known as diverticulitis. It is currently unclear what causes those episodes but it is thought to be related to an inflammation and/or infection occurring as a result of an overgrowth of bacteria in the diverticula.

During a flare-up you are likely to experience symptoms such as altered bowels habits (diarrhoea and/or constipation), fever, vomiting, abdominal pain/bloating and/or blood in stools. Consider speaking to your GP if you think you are experiencing a flare up to seek further support.

Recent evidence suggests that there is no clear benefit to reducing fibre intake during episodes of diverticulitis. Advice may however be different when complications of diverticulitis occur for example fistulas, abscesses, perforation, bowel blockages or after surgery to the bowel. Your doctor or dietitian can provide further advice as needed.

Be aware that some other foods and drinks can also increase the movement of food through your gut and cause diarrhoea. This effect can vary from person to person. You may find that taking less of the food and drinks below will improve your symptoms:

Caffeinated drinks e.g. tea, coffee, cola drinks (try decaffeinated versions instead)	Fizzy drinks and sugar free products containing sorbitol, mannitol and xylitol
Alcohol	Fruit juice (no more than one glass per day) / Fruit smoothies
Spicy foods	Fried/Fatty foods

Probiotics

There are inconclusive results from the use of probiotics to prevent diverticular disease progressing or treating episodes of diverticulitis. Therefore, the use of probiotics in diverticular disease cannot be advised at this time.

Further information [Last accessed Feb 2024]:

The British Dietetic Association (BDA). *Food facts (Wholegrains, Fluids (water and drinks) and hydration, Fibre, Fruit and vegetables - how to get five-a-day)* at <https://www.bda.uk.com/food-health/food-facts.html>

Guts UK. *Diverticular Disease & Diverticulitis* at <https://gutscharity.org.uk/advice-and-information/conditions/diverticular-disease/>

Patient webinars. Diverticular Disease at <https://patientwebinars.co.uk/condition/diverticular-disease/>

Public Health England. *The Eatwell Guide: Helping you eat a healthy, balanced diet* at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742750/Eatwell_Guide_booklet_2018v4.pdf

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