



Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

Dietary advice for patients with diverticular disease

Information for patients

Name _____

Your dietitian _____

Dietitian contact number: 0118 322 7116

What is diverticular disease?

It is a condition that affects the large intestine (colon), occurring when pouches called diverticula are pushed through the wall of the large intestine. It is often associated with aging, as the muscles in the colon weaken. You are more prone to developing these bulges if you do not have enough fibre in your diet and/or need to strain to open your bowels. Dietary fibre is part of fruits, grains and vegetables that our bodies are unable to digest and thus helps to improve the bulk of stools and helps to keep bowel motions regular.

Lack of dietary fibre slows down the speed at which food and fluids pass through the bowel. As a result, more water is reabsorbed from the waste products resulting in small, firm stools which are more difficult to pass.

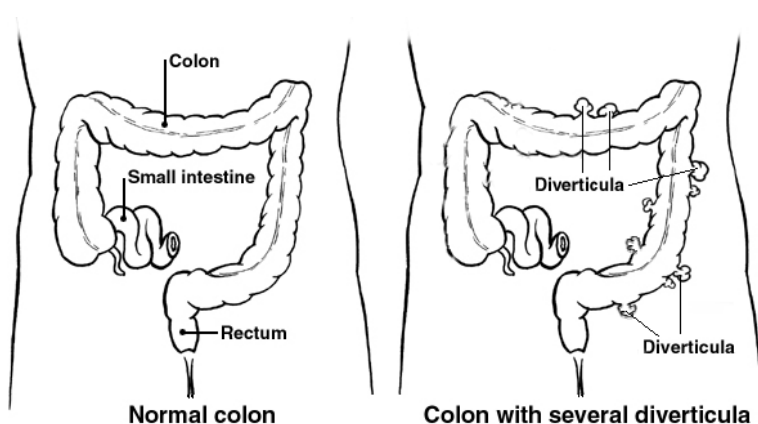


Image courtesy of Patient Media <http://m.patient.media/images/003.gif>

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Your risk of developing diverticular disease increases if you have a history of smoking, obesity, suffer with constipation, use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (Ibuprofen and Naproxen) and if you are over the age of 50 years. A high intake of red meat (beef, pork and lamb) in the diet has also been associated with increased risk of developing diverticular disease.

The symptoms of diverticular disease include a feeling of bloating, and pain especially in the lower left side of your abdomen.

This pain can often become worse after eating. Breaking wind or passing stools, often helps to relieve the pain.

When the disease is well controlled and there are no symptoms associated with one or multiple diverticula this is known as diverticulosis.

What is diverticulitis?

When these diverticula become inflamed or infected, they can cause the acute condition called diverticulitis. It is thought that the infection occurs when a hard piece of stool or undigested piece of food is trapped in one of the pouches, attracting bacteria, which multiply and then spread.

The symptoms of diverticulitis can develop over a few days and are often associated with constant severe abdominal pain, a high temperature (above 38°C), feeling run down and tired; nausea and vomiting, occasional blood in poo.

If you develop any of the symptoms described above, please seek medical advice as soon as possible.

Lifestyle recommendations for diverticular disease:

- Minimal use of alcohol, caffeine, aspirin and non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. ibuprofen). It is recommended to use paracetamol if pain medicine is needed.
- Regular exercise (aim for 30 minutes five days a week).
- Stop smoking.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Reduce red meat to 2-3 portions per week; aim to have meat-free days twice per week.
- Reduce intake of fatty foods.

Dietary recommendations for diverticular disease:

- **High fibre diet** – recommended daily intake is 20-35g per day (please increase your fibre intake gradually; a hasty introduction can cause gas, bloating and diarrhoea). The following foods are good sources of fibre:
 - Beans and pulses – black beans, kidney beans, baked beans, chickpeas, butter beans, lentils.
 - Rice – brown or wild.
 - Quinoa.
 - Fruit – all kinds, fresh, dried, raw or cooked (with the skin and pips).
 - Vegetables – all kinds, fresh, dried, raw or cooked.
 - Nuts, seeds, popcorn and seeded fruit – avoidance is no longer recommended as they are a great source of fibre. (Previously it was believed that they could get stuck in the diverticula and cause inflammation).
 - Wholegrain – pasta, cereal, pasta and bread.
- **Drink plenty of water** – to help your body use the fibre well (aim for at least 2000ml per day).
- **Supplements** – speak to your doctor to see if you need fibre supplements or stool bulking agents.
- **Probiotics** – There is no evidence that probiotics (good bacteria) are helpful in treating episodes of diverticulitis.

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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