



Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust
Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

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.

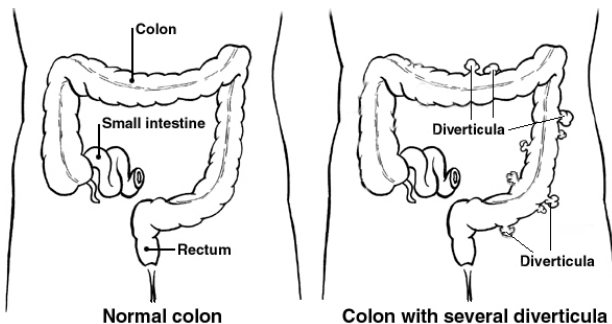


Image courtesy of Patient Media
<http://m.patient.media/images/003.gif>

Dietary fibre is the part of fruits, grains and vegetables that our bodies are unable to digest. It helps to improve the bulk of stools (poo) 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 that are more difficult to pass.

Causes of diverticular disease

The exact cause is unknown, but as we age our risk increases.

For more information, visit <https://gutscharity.org.uk/advice-and-information/conditions/diverticular-disease/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diverticular-disease-and-diverticulitis/>

When the disease is well controlled and there are no symptoms associated with one or multiple diverticula, it is known as diverticulosis. You may still experience bloating and minor discomfort after eating.

What is diverticulitis?

When these diverticula become inflamed or infected, they can cause an acute condition called diverticulitis. It is thought that the infection occurs when a hard piece of stool or undigested 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:

- Keep within safe alcohol limits. For more information, visit <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>
- Check with your GP regarding any medications that may worsen risks associated with diverticular disease
- Avoid smoking.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

Dietary recommendations for diverticular disease:

What to do when well or in remission:

- **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 skin and pips).
 - Vegetables – all kinds, fresh, dried, raw or cooked.
 - Nuts, seeds, popcorn and seeded fruit are 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.For more information, visit www.bda.uk.com/resource/fibre.html
- **Drink plenty of water:** this will help with regular bowel movements.

- **Supplements:** speak to your doctor to see if you need fibre supplements or stool bulking agents.

What to do when in a flare up (diverticulitis):

- **Please only follow the advice below if you have a severe flare (i.e. perforation, abscess, drains and/or surgery required). If you are unsure, please discuss with your medical team.**
1. Temporarily reduce your fibre intake
 - Aim for plain, low fibre foods such as white bread/ rice/ pasta.
 - Avoid skins and seeds.
 2. Continue to drink plenty of fluid.
 3. You may find softer food more comfortable on your stomach (e.g. smooth soups, yogurts, mashed potato etc).
 4. Avoid foods that are likely to trigger your symptoms such as spicy, greasy and acidic foods.

For more information, visit www.bda.uk.com/resource/diet-and-diverticular-disease.html

You will usually only need to follow this diet for a short period (usually a couple of days), until your symptoms settle down. When your symptoms improve, gradually start to re-introduce fibre again.

Please see the 'Modifying fibre in your diet' leaflet for more information on the different types of fibre.

Further advice

www.nhs.uk/conditions/diverticular-disease-and-diverticulitis/
<https://gutscharity.org.uk/advice-and-information/conditions/diverticular-disease/>

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

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