



The Surgical Institute
at True North

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Diverticular Disease

What is Diverticular Disease?

Diverticulosis - Diverticulosis is when small outpouchings develop along the large intestine. Diverticulosis is often found with a test done for other reasons, such as flexible sigmoidoscopy, colonoscopy, or barium enema. Most people with Diverticulosis have no symptoms and will remain symptom free for the rest of their lives.

Diverticulitis - Inflammation of a diverticulum (diverticulitis) occurs when there is thinning of the diverticular wall. This may be caused by increased pressure within the colon or hardened particles of the stool, which can become lodged within the diverticulum. Both of these events decrease blood flow to the diverticulum and cause a local infection.

The symptoms of diverticulitis depend upon the degree of inflammation present. The most common symptom is pain in the left lower abdomen. Other symptoms can include nausea and vomiting, constipation, diarrhea, rectal bleeding, and urinary symptoms.

Complications associated with diverticulitis can include the following:

Abscess - a localized collections of pus

Fistula - an abnormal tract between two areas that are not normally connected
(eg, bowel and bladder)

Obstruction - a blockage of the colon

Peritonitis - infection involving the space around the abnormal organ

Sepsis - overwhelming bodywide infection that can lead to failure of multiple organs

Diverticular Bleeding - Diverticular bleeding occurs when a small artery located within the diverticulum breaks through the skin into the colon. Diverticular bleeding usually causes painless bleeding from the rectum. In about 50 percent of cases, the person will see maroon or bright red blood with bowel movements.

Is bleeding with a bowel movement normal? - It is not normal to see blood in a bowel movement; this can be a sign of severe conditions, some of which are serious and require immediate treatment. Anyone who sees blood after a bowel movement should consult with their healthcare provider to determine if further testing or evaluation is needed.

Diverticular Disease Treatment

People with diverticulosis who do not have symptoms do not require treatment, however, most clinicians recommend increasing fiber in the diet, which can help to bulk the stools and possibly prevent the development of new diverticulosis, diverticulitis, or diverticular bleeding. However, fiber is not proven to prevent these conditions.

Home Treatment - If you have mild symptoms of diverticulosis, you can be treated at home with a clear liquid diet and oral antibiotics. However, if you develop one or more of the following signs or symptoms, you should seek immediate medical attention:

1. Temperature >100.1 degrees Fahrenheit
2. Abdominal pain
3. Inability to tolerate fluids

Increase Fiber - Fruits and vegetables are a good source of fiber. The fiber content of packaged foods can be calculated by re-reading the nutrition label.

Seeds and Nuts - Patients with diverticular disease have historically been advised to avoid whole pieces of fiber (such as corn, seeds, and nuts) because of concern that these foods could cause an episode of diverticulitis. However, this belief is completely unproven. We do not suggest that patients with diverticulosis avoid seeds, corn, or nuts.

After diverticulitis resolves - After an episode of diverticulitis resolves, colonoscopy should be performed to determine the extent of disease and to rule out the presence of abnormal lesions such as polyps or cancer.