



# Diverticular disease

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Version 6

## **> About this leaflet**

The purpose of this leaflet is to tell you about Diverticular Disease, its causes and treatments.

## **> What is diverticular disease?**

Diverticular disease is a common benign condition which primarily affects the large bowel. It is generally uncomplicated and is managed with a high fibre and fluid diet.

A diverticulum (diverticula if there is more than one) is an outpouching of the lining of the bowel through the muscular layer of the bowel wall. The most common site of diverticula is in the distal large bowel. The presence of diverticula is known as diverticulosis.

Diverticula increase with age. More than half the population over 70 has diverticula. They are thought to occur as a result of inadequate fibre in the diet. If little fibre is present, the stools tend to be smaller and harder, meaning the muscle layer in the bowel has to work harder.

### **Symptoms**

The most common symptoms are alternating constipation and diarrhoea. Rarely patients may have left sided or lower abdominal pain. Uncomplicated diverticular disease may produce no symptoms.

### **Possible complications**

Generally, diverticula are not harmful. There are, however, a few complications which can occur. Each of these complications are rare:

- They can become inflamed (diverticulitis), which causes pain, fevers and often a change in bowel habit.
- The inflamed area can form an abscess. When mild, diverticulitis is treated with antibiotics, sometimes in hospital. If the abscess bursts, surgical treatment may be required.
- Diverticula can also bleed. This is normally a self-limiting bleed but may require a hospital admission.
- Diverticula can cause such thickening of the bowel that a blockage occurs. This will result in pain, abdominal distension, constipation and possibly vomiting. This requires surgical treatment.

## ➤ How is diverticular disease diagnosed?

Diverticular Disease is diagnosed through a flexible sigmoidoscopy or a barium enema to visualise the pockets in the bowel.

### Treatment

For most patients, diverticular disease is uncomplicated and is managed with a high fibre diet and adequate fluid intake; the current recommendation is two litres of fluid per day. This can prevent progression of the disease and reduces complications.

The following foods are high in fibre:

- cereals;
- wholegrain bread;
- fruit and vegetables; and
- seeds and nuts.

Where a high fibre diet is difficult, a fibre supplement is advised. A prescription can be obtained from your GP.

Surgery is generally only required if there are complications related to the diverticula, such as recurrent diverticulitis or abscess formation. Your GP may be able to provide further information if required.

## ➤ Contact

If you have any problems or questions, please contact the day unit via the switchboard on 0141 951 5000. The day unit operates Monday to Friday 7.30am to 8pm but please only telephone the unit between the hours of 8am and 7pm. Outwith these hours you should contact the Senior Nurse via the switchboard as well. Information is available at <https://gutscharity.org.uk/>

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