



Diverticular Disease

What is it?

Diverticulosis is the common condition of having small pouches or sacs in the inner lining of the large intestine. These pouches or sacs are called diverticulae.

These out-pouchings in the colon are thought to be caused by a low fiber diet and is thought to be associated with constipation and straining causing too much pressure on the bowel wall. **Diverticulosis** is common in industrialized countries where low fiber diets are common. It is rare in countries like Asia and Africa where people eat high fiber vegetable diets. It also becomes more common with age. In the USA about half of people over 60 have **diverticulosis**.

Diverticulitis is the inflammation and infection of the diverticulae. Left untreated, **diverticulitis** can be life-threatening.

With **diverticulosis**, there may be no symptoms at all, or may be mild cramping and/or bloating. Constipation and rectal bleeding can occur.

If the pouches become infected (**diverticulitis**) there is abdominal pain, cramping, fever, vomiting, nausea, chills and tenderness on the left side of the abdomen. Medical treatment is necessary.

Complications of **diverticulitis** include: infection, colon perforations, abdominal peritonitis, intestinal blockages. Treatments include antibiotics, and possibly surgery to remove the infected part of the colon.

Nutrition and Prevention of Flare-ups

Fiber is an important part of the diet for patients with [diverticulosis](#). A high-fiber diet softens and gives bulk to the stool, and speeds up the transit time to allow the stool to pass quickly and easily. This can prevent flare-ups of [diverticulitis](#).

Sources of fiber include:

- Hot cereals such as oatmeal and cream of wheat
- Whole wheat breads
- Fruits and Vegetables. Beans and legumes
- Bran muffins and cereals: look for cereals with 14grams of fiber per serving
- Your Health care provider may recommend Citrucel or Metamucil, these can be mixed with water or juice and provide 2-3.5 grams of fiber a day

A more complete list of high fiber foods can be found on the [Maine Medical Center Digestive Health Center website](#) under [High Fiber Diet](#).

Slowly increase the amount of fiber in the diet to minimize bloating and gas. It is important to drink plenty of fluids — eight to 10 cups daily — with high-fiber diet. Exercise promotes normal bowel habits and helps prevent constipation.

Too many beverages with caffeine (coffee, tea) or alcohol can lead to dehydration and cause constipation. Remember to eat regular meals, a balanced diet and drink plenty of water. Discuss any questions with a dietician.

Foods to Avoid

Corn, peanuts and popcorn have been traditionally on the ‘do not eat’ list for those with diverticulosis. New research has questioned this. A study in the August 27, 2008 issue of *the Journal of the American Medical Association* looked at 47,228 men age 40 to 75 years who at baseline were free of diverticulosis or its complications, cancer, and inflammatory bowel disease. During 18 years of follow-up, there were 801 new cases of diverticulitis and 383 new cases of diverticular bleeding.

The research revealed that nut, corn, and popcorn consumption was not associated with an increased risk of new diverticulitis or diverticular complications. The research article cited men with the highest intake of nuts (at least twice per week) had a 20 percent lower risk of diverticulitis compared with men with the lowest intake (less than once per month); men with the highest intake of popcorn had a 28 percent lower risk of diverticulitis compared with men with the lowest intake. There was no association between corn, nut or popcorn consumption and diverticulitis, and/or diverticular bleeding. A discussion with your doctor about eating these foods is warranted if you have diverticulosis.

Other Guidelines for People with Diverticulosis:

- If constipated, eat foods high in fiber
- Eat a low-fat diet
- Drink enough fluids
- Exercise on a regular basis as regular exercise promotes normal bowel movements, helps prevent constipation and reduces the risk of future attacks.

Guidelines for those with Diverticulitis:

After an acute attack of **Diverticulitis** the bowel may be inflamed and swollen. At this time a low fiber or low residue diet may be recommended until the flare subsides, examples of a low fiber food are as follows:

- Apple sauce
- Banana
- Bran cereals
- Canned peaches
- Canned pears
- Lettuce
- Peeled potatoes
- Refined hot cereals such as oatmeal, farina and cream of wheat

- Refined wheat breads or white bread
- Tender cooked vegetables such as asparagus tips, beets, mushrooms, turnips and pumpkin
- Tomato juice, tomato sauce
- Vegetable juices

You can find more information on Low Fiber diets on our website.