

# Diverticular disease

**Nutrition and Dietetics  
Department**

**Patient Information Leaflet**

## Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have diverticular disease. It contains information about the disease and the best foods to eat if you have it.

## What is diverticular disease?

Diverticular disease affects mainly the large bowel (colon). In diverticular disease, small bulges or pockets develop in the lining of the intestine. These are known as diverticula if there is more than one, or diverticulum, if there is only one (see figure 1).

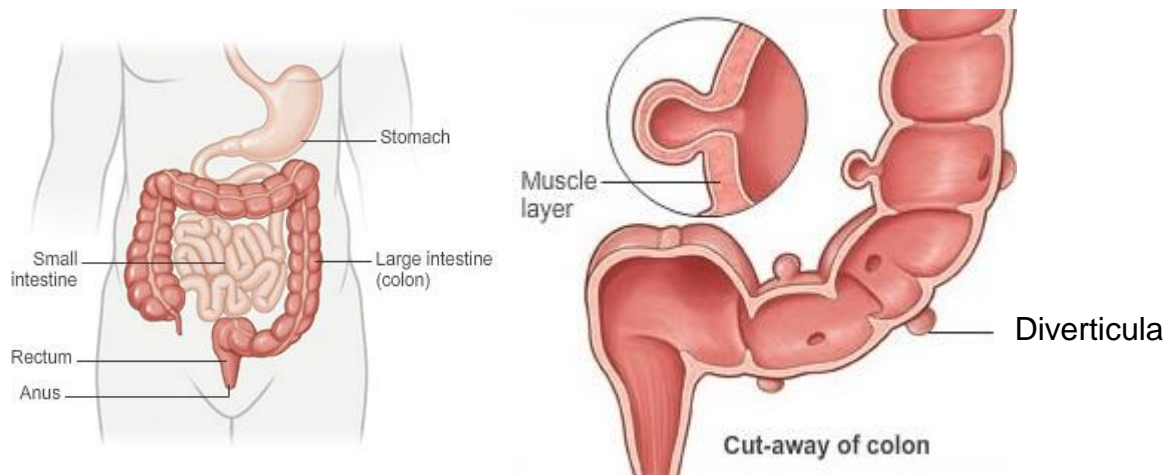


Figure 1 shows a normal colon and a colon with diverticular disease  
**(Images courtesy of NHS Choices)**

The pouches form at weak points in the gut wall because of increased pressure in the gut over time. Constipation, due to a diet with little fibre, can cause this increase in pressure. Fibre is the roughage in the diet that is not digested.

A low fibre intake means stools are drier, smaller and more difficult to pass. This means muscles in the gut have to strain and push harder to move them, increasing pressure in the gut.

Diverticula are common, especially in older people, but younger people can have them too.

## What are the symptoms of diverticular disease?

Common symptoms include abdominal (tummy) pain, a change in bowel habits such as constipation and/or diarrhoea, bloating and excess wind. However, different people have different symptoms.

### Diverticulosis

Many people with diverticula do not have any symptoms. If you have diverticula but do not have any symptoms, this is known as diverticulosis.

### Diverticulitis

This is inflammation of the diverticula. It can be caused by infection, which can happen when stool is trapped in the pouches and bacteria (germs) in the stool cause infection.

Symptoms of diverticulitis can start suddenly. They include abdominal pain and tenderness, cramping, fever, chills, altered bowel habits, bleeding from the back passage, nausea and vomiting.

## How is diverticular disease treated?

Diverticular disease will not go away, but many people can avoid major symptoms and diverticulitis with the help of the following treatments:

- High fibre diet
- Drinking plenty of water – at least eight to 10 cups a day
- Sometimes tablets may be prescribed to relieve spasms in the bowel and reduce discomfort

Mild diverticulitis can usually be treated at home with antibiotics prescribed by your GP. More serious cases may need hospital treatment to prevent and treat complications.

The rest of this leaflet describes how your diet can help diverticular disease.

## Diet and diverticular disease

Diverticular disease responds well to a diet high in fibre. Fruit, vegetables and cereals are a good source of fibre. Although fibre is not digested in its journey through the digestive system, it is nevertheless essential to help keep the lining of the bowel healthy.

However, some fibrous foods cause wind to be produced or have been found to be an irritant, which aggravates diverticular disease. Wind consists of gases that are produced by the gut during the digestive process. Some people produce a lot of wind. Everyone's digestive tracts are different. All foods affect people differently.

## **Fibrous foods that may cause wind or irritation**

These include onions, greens such as sprouts and cabbage, vegetable skins, tomato pips and skins, fruit skins, raspberry pips, peas, beans, sweetcorn, nuts, coconut and seeds.

## **Non fibrous foods that may cause wind**

These include fizzy drinks and beer.

## **How do I include fibre in my diet?**

Always remember that normally foods rich in fibre have a beneficial effect on the digestive tract. Try including fibrous food but avoiding those in the section 'Fibrous foods that may cause wind or irritation'.

The following list may give you some ideas on how to easily include fibre into your daily diet.

### **Eat plenty of vegetables and/or salad**

- Aim for two servings or more a day
- One serving is three tablespoons

### **Eat plenty of fruit**

- Aim for three portions of fruit a day
- One serving is two tablespoons of stewed or tinned fruit, or a piece of fresh fruit.

(Please check previous list of foods to avoid).

### **Choose high fibre or wholemeal bread and cereals**

- If you do not like wholemeal bread, try high fibre white bread
- Branflakes, Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, porridge, puffed wheat or sultana bran are examples of high fibre cereals
- Choose biscuits or crackers that contain wholemeal flour, for example, digestives or Ryvita

### **If you eat rice or pasta, try the brown varieties**

It is important to increase the fibre in your diet slowly over two to three weeks.

## Drinking more

It is important to drink plenty of fluid (not alcohol), especially when having more fibre. Fibre is like a sponge and soaks up fluid making stools softer. Increasing fibre without drinking plenty can make constipation worse, as stools will be hard, dry and difficult to pass.

Aim to drink at least eight to 10 cups or glasses of fluid each day. This works out as about two litres.

Hot drinks may help to stimulate the bowel which is also good for preventing constipation.

## Some more tips

- Have regular meals as this will help stop wind building up in your gut.
- Have a balanced diet. It is important not to make your diet too limited. If you cut out too many foods, important nutrients and vitamins can be missed out.
- Chew food well.
- Avoid large portions if your symptoms are worse after eating meals.
- Some people find fatty foods such as cheese, cream, fatty meat, pies and pastries, harder to tolerate.
- Keep active as physical activity helps keep the bowel moving and this helps with constipation.

## Can I find out more?

You can find out more from the following:

### Core

3 St Andrews Place, London NW1 4LB

<http://www.corecharity.org.uk/>

### NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Diverticular-disease-and-diverticulitis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Dietitians on 01384 244017 (8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number:  
01384 456111

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dudleygroup.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/gastroenterology/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@dgh.nhs.uk)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

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Ulotka dostępna jest również w dużym druku, wersji audio lub w innym języku. W tym celu zadzwoń pod numer 0800 073 0510.

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