

Diverticulosis

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A patient's guide



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What is diverticulosis?

Diverticulosis consists of small pockets in the wall of the bowel. They can become inflamed (called diverticulitis) and this can cause pain, diarrhoea or bleeding from your bowel.

Who can get diverticulosis?

Diverticulosis is common in people over the age of 50. It is thought to be caused by pressure waves in the wall of the bowel that squeeze out the small pockets.

How is diverticulosis diagnosed?

People who have diverticulosis may notice pain in the lower left side of the abdomen. They may have episodes of diarrhoea or bleeding from their bowel.

These can also be caused by more serious conditions such as bowel cancer, so people who have these symptoms are often advised to have tests to check that they do not have cancer.

There is **no** connection between diverticulosis and bowel cancer, its just that they both tend to occur in older people and may have similar symptoms.

The common tests used to diagnose diverticulosis or bowel cancer either involve a flexible steerable tube being passed into the bowel through the anus (flexible sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy) or a special type of CT scan.

What is the treatment for diverticulosis?

For most people with diverticulosis the only treatment required is to avoid foods that bring on the pain or the diarrhoea. In most cases this means eating **more** roughage or fibre in their diet, especially fresh vegetables and fruit, and drinking more water.

This gives the bowel something to squeeze on, and helps the motions pass through the part of the bowel with the pockets in the walls more easily.

Some people find that using a laxative from time to time also helps. In a small number of people the diverticulosis will have already caused scarring and narrowing in the wall of the bowel.

When this happens, a lot of fibre in the diet can actually cause more pain when the bulky motions pass through the narrowed part. So for these people it may help to eat **less** fibre.

Rarely the diverticulosis becomes inflamed and may even form an abscess. If this happens the person feels severe constant pain in the lower left side of the abdomen and may have a fast heart beat and a high temperature.

If this happens the person is advised to stop eating but keep drinking, and to seek medical help immediately since they will need strong antibiotics and may need emergency surgery.