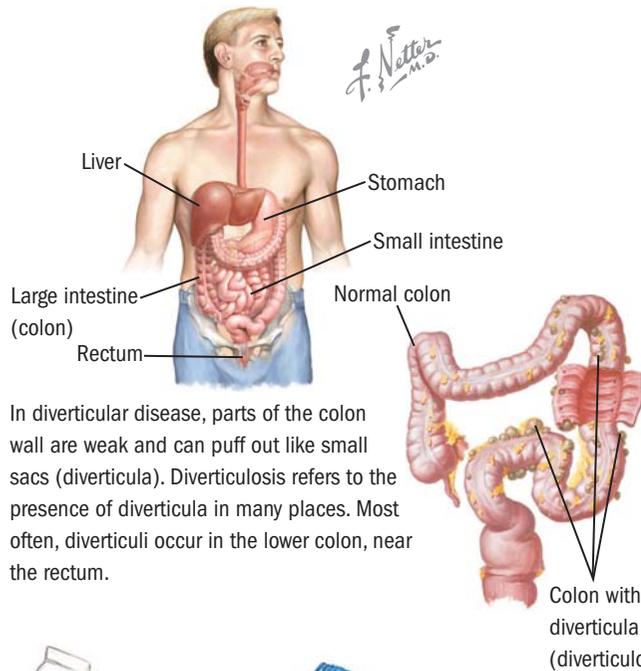


# MANAGING YOUR DIVERTICULOSIS



In diverticular disease, parts of the colon wall are weak and can puff out like small sacs (diverticula). Diverticulosis refers to the presence of diverticula in many places. Most often, diverticuli occur in the lower colon, near the rectum.



The cause isn't known. Diverticulosis can occur if food by-products and feces move too slowly through the colon, so people who eat a high-fat diet without much fiber are more likely to have diverticula.

Most people have no symptoms. Some have mild cramping in the left side of the abdomen, often relieved by a bowel movement or passing gas. Constipation may sometimes occur.



Barium enema x-ray showing diverticulosis



Diverticula seen during colonoscopy

Your doctor will do a colonoscopy or rarely a barium enema x-ray examination for diagnosis.

## What Is Diverticulosis?

The large intestine (colon) is the last part of the digestive tract. Food passes through it just before waste leaves the body as a bowel movement (stool). In diverticular disease, parts of the colon wall are weak. These weak places can puff out like small sacs (diverticula). Each sac is called a diverticulum. These parts can become red and swollen (inflamed) and infected. Diverticulosis refers to the presence of diverticula in many places. Most often, diverticuli occur in the lower part of the colon (sigmoid and distal colon) near the rectum.

The condition is a lifelong problem. Up to 20% of the general population has diverticulosis. Older people tend to have diverticuli more often than younger people. Up to 50% of people at age 50 will have them. Complications include infection (diverticulitis) and bleeding.

## What Causes Diverticulosis?

The cause is the bulging (herniation) of the colon wall (mucosa) through the muscular layer of the colon. The reason for the herniation is unknown. Diverticulosis can occur if food breakdown products and feces move too slowly through the colon. People who eat a low-fiber diet are much more likely to form diverticula. It's not contagious or cancerous.

## What Are the Symptoms of Diverticulosis?

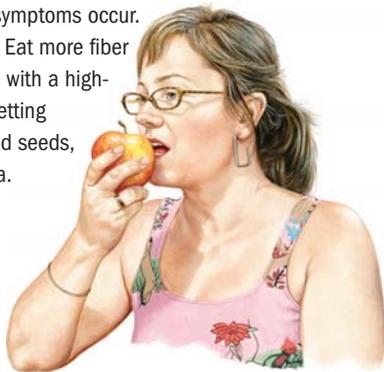
Most people don't have any symptoms. About 10% to 20% of people have mild cramping in the left side of the abdomen (belly). A bowel movement or passing gas often relieves the cramping. Constipation may be an occasional problem.

## How Is Diverticulosis Diagnosed?

Diverticulosis is diagnosed with a colonoscopy. In a colonoscopy, the doctor looks at the whole colon using a lighted flexible tube put through the rectum. The tube has a tiny camera that lets the doctor look for problem spots and take pictures. Before this test, a laxative must be taken to empty all food from the colon. Rarely a barium enema may be done in place of colonoscopy. For the barium enema x-ray examination, a liquid containing the substance barium is placed in the rectum. The liquid makes it easier to see inside the colon. Diverticulosis is often found when tests are done for another disorder.

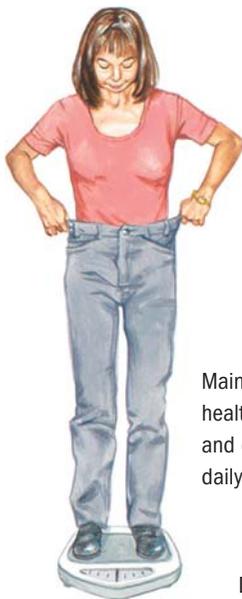
## MANAGING YOUR DIVERTICULOSIS

No treatment is needed unless symptoms occur. For symptoms, change your diet. Eat more fiber and fluids. Avoiding constipation with a high-fiber diet will lower chances of getting diverticulosis. Also avoid nuts and seeds, which can get stuck in diverticula.



Taking stool softeners may help symptoms.

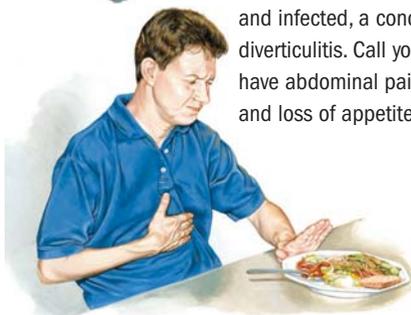
Drink plenty of fluids.



Maintain a healthy weight and exercise daily.



Diverticula can become inflamed and infected, a condition called diverticulitis. Call your doctor if you have abdominal pain, fever and chills, and loss of appetite.



### How Is Diverticulosis Treated?

No treatment is needed unless symptoms occur. For symptoms, a change in diet, with more fiber and fluids, and use of stool softeners will help. Avoid nuts and seeds, which can get stuck in diverticula.

### DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Diverticulosis:

- ✓ **DO** eat a high-fiber, low-salt, low-fat diet. Avoiding constipation with a high-fiber diet will lower chances of getting diverticulosis.
- ✓ **DO** drink plenty of fluids.
- ✓ **DO** keep physically active.
- ✓ **DO** maintain your correct weight. Try to lose weight if you're overweight.
- ✓ **DO** maintain good bowel habits by trying to have a bowel movement daily.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have blood in your stool or dark, tarry bowel movements.
- ✓ **DO** watch for signs of diverticulitis and complications, such as abdominal pain and fever.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you have a fever or abdominal pain or your pain becomes worse.
- ⊘ **DON'T** strain with bowel movements.
- ⊘ **DON'T** use laxatives.

### FROM THE DESK OF

#### NOTES

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following source:

• National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse  
Tel: (800) 891-5389  
**Website:** <http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/digest/nddic.htm>

• American College of Gastroenterology  
Tel: (703) 820-7400  
**Website:** <http://www.acg.gi.org>