



## Diverticular Disease Handout

**Diverticular disease** is a common condition that affects the colon (large intestine). It includes two main problems: **diverticulosis** and **diverticulitis**.

### What is diverticulosis?

Diverticulosis means having small pouches (called diverticula) in the wall of your colon. Most people with diverticulosis have no symptoms and may only find out about it during a colonoscopy or imaging test.

### What is diverticulitis?

Diverticulitis happens when these pouches become inflamed or infected. This can cause pain, usually in the lower left side of your abdomen, along with fever, nausea, and sometimes changes in your bowel movements.

### How common is it?

Diverticulosis is very common, especially as people get older. About half of adults over age 60 have diverticulosis, but only 1% to 4% will develop diverticulitis in their lifetime.

### What causes diverticular disease?

The exact cause is not fully understood, but it is linked to a mix of genetics, diet, lifestyle, and changes in the gut. About half of the risk for diverticulitis comes from genetic factors.

Other risk factors include:

- Low-fiber, high red meat diets
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Lack of physical activity
- Use of certain medications (like NSAIDs, steroids, and opiates)

## How is it diagnosed?

Doctors diagnose diverticulitis based on symptoms and may use blood tests and imaging, such as a CT scan, to confirm the diagnosis and check for complications.

Diverticulosis is often found during routine colonoscopy or imaging for other reasons.

## How is it treated?

- **Diverticulosis:** No treatment is needed if you have no symptoms. Eating a healthy, high-fiber diet may help prevent problems.

- **Uncomplicated diverticulitis:** Most people can be treated at home with rest, pain control (like acetaminophen), and a temporary clear liquid diet. Antibiotics are not always needed and are usually reserved for people with more severe symptoms, older adults, or those with other health problems.

- **Complicated diverticulitis:** If there are complications (like abscess, perforation, or severe infection), treatment may include hospitalization, intravenous antibiotics, drainage procedures, or sometimes surgery.

## Dietary concerns and prevention:

- A **high-fiber diet** (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes) is linked to a lower risk of diverticulitis. Fiber supplements are not a substitute for a healthy diet.

- Limiting **red meat** and processed foods may help reduce risk.

- **Nuts, seeds, corn, and popcorn** do not increase the risk of diverticulitis and do not need to be avoided.

- Staying **physically active**, maintaining a healthy weight, and not smoking are also important for prevention.

- Alcohol use is linked to bleeding but not to diverticulitis itself.

## Other important points:

- Most people with diverticulosis never develop diverticulitis.

- After an episode of diverticulitis, a colonoscopy may be recommended to rule out other conditions, but not during a flare-up.

- Surgery is rarely needed and is usually reserved for people with repeated severe attacks or complications.

If you have questions or new symptoms, talk to your healthcare provider. Making healthy lifestyle choices can help lower your risk of problems from diverticular disease.

## References

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