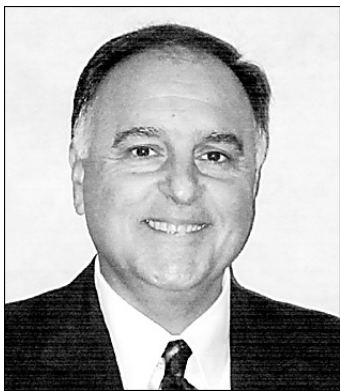


Diverticulosis



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"Diverticulosis" is the condition where small pouches occur in the wall of the intestine. Diverticulosis more often develops in the large intestine known as the colon.

A diverticulum can develop where a blood vessel normally enters the colon wall. When pressure in the colon is too high, this weak spot can allow the inner lining to herniate into the muscular wall. Most patients with diverticulosis have no symptoms, but many patients experience lower abdominal discomfort and bowel habit changes. The location of diverticula next to blood vessels explains why some patients can experience significant intestinal hemorrhaging. "Diverticulitis" means infection. These pouches have thinner walls than the normal colon and they can leak bacteria and intestinal contents. A diverticulitis attack can be relatively mild with abdominal pain and low grade fever and respond to antibiotics but can at times be quite severe. Surgery (occasionally requiring a temporary colostomy bag) may be required for more severe complications such as abscess, perforation, peritonitis, blockages and abnormal connections (fistulas) between the colon and other organs.

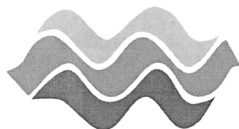
Although rare prior to the 1900's, diverticular disease is now quite common. World population studies have correlated the development of diverticulosis with low fiber diets. Dietary fiber refers to that part of plant material we eat but cannot absorb. It serves to regulate our bowel function against both constipation and diarrhea by acting like a sponge to absorb water and keeps stool bulky, soft and easy to pass. Our recent highly refined diets provide high calories at the expense of our whole grain, fruit, and vegetable intake.

In the past, doctors advised patients to avoid eating "roughage" like nuts, corn and seeds fearing that these foods would get stuck and cause diverticulitis. No evidence supports this. At colonoscopy, we frequently see food impacted in diverticula with no diverticulitis. Today, most gastroenterologists do not prohibit these foods. Simply put, there is no food you need to avoid.

The treatment is a high fiber diet. By reducing colonic muscular spasm that causes high pressures, fiber protects against the development of diverticula. At least 20-25 grams a day is recommended. Half of your daily requirement can be met with a high fiber breakfast cereal. Read labels! Some supplements are poor choices with only 0.5 grams of fiber per capsule. A gradual increase will usually overcome any initial discomfort some may experience. Think of fiber as physical therapy for your GI tract!

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