WESTERN CONNECTICUT HEALTH NETWORK
DANBURY HOSPITAL • NEW MILFORD HOSPITAL

Patient Education Sheet

What is Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis?

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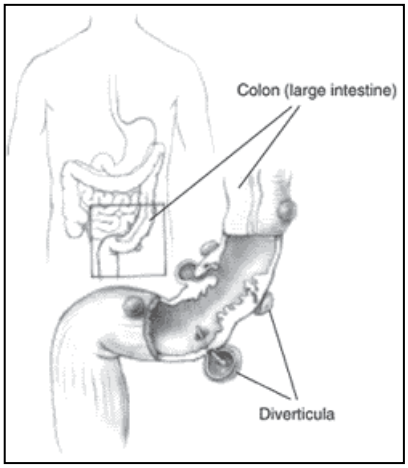
Diverticulosis is a common condition in which small pouches in the colon (large intestine) bulge outward through weak spots in the intestinal wall. These pouches are called diverticula. When these pouches become infected or inflamed, this is then called diverticulitis.

If one of these infected diverticula ruptures, the infection could spread to the whole abdomen. This is known as peritonitis, which can be life-threatening.

What causes Diverticulosis?

A low-fiber diet and constipation are thought to be causes of diverticular disease. This disease was first noticed when low-fiber processed foods were introduced in the American diet. Since this time, diverticular disease has become common in developed countries, such as the United States, England, and Australia, where diets low in fiber are common.

A low-fiber diet may result in constipation. This constipation causes hard, difficult bowel movements (stools) that require the colon to exert more pressure to push along. This increased pressure over time causes these weak spots in the colon to bulge out and become diverticula.



Source: National Digestive Diseases Clearinghouse @ http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov

Diverticulitis is thought to be caused when stool and bacteria become caught in the diverticula. Diverticulitis can develop suddenly and without prior symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

Diverticulosis

- There may be no symptoms
- Mild cramps
- Bloating
- Constipation
- Rectal Bleeding

Diverticulitis

- Abdominal pain, cramping, vomiting
- Tenderness around the left side of the abdomen
- Symptoms of infection: fever, nausea, vomiting, chills

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How are Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis diagnosed?

Your doctor will obtain a health history and perform a medical exam, along with ordering diagnostic tests. If your symptoms are mild, such as bloating, mild cramping, and constipation, your physician may order tests such as a colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, or barium enema. These are all procedures that enable your doctor to "see" the inside of the colon.

If your symptoms are more severe, your physician may not want to perform one of the above procedures that are more invasive. He/she may order a regular abdominal x-ray and CAT scan to determine how inflamed your colon is before attempting a scope procedure.

How are Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis treated?

For Diverticulosis, your doctor may recommend to increase both fluid and fiber in your diet to reduce constipation and the potential for diverticulitis. A high fiber diet along with extra fluids helps to keep bowel movements soft and to lower pressure inside the colon so that the bowel contents will move along easier.

The recommendation to avoid nuts, seeds, popcorn and raw vegetables has been questioned by health care professionals recently. Ask your physician if you should limit or avoid these foods.

Treatment for diverticulitis may include taking antibiotics, limiting diet to clear liquids to rest the colon, and minimizing complications. If this is not successful or if the attack of diverticulitis is severe, your doctor may advise surgery to remove the affected part of the colon.

Notes/Additional Information:

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Source:

National Digestive Diseases Clearinghouse. Retrieved from http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov