

DIVERTICULAR DISEASE

Keeping Your Colon Healthy

If you have diverticular disease, you can take steps to make your colon healthier. Increase the amount of fiber in your diet. Also, drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Try to exercise most days of the week. In addition, get screening tests for colon problems as recommended by your doctor. Over time, these actions may help prevent future problems.



Also available in Spanish

Getting Enough Fiber

You need 25 to 38 grams of fiber each day to keep the colon working at its best. To meet this goal, your doctor may recommend taking fiber supplements. You can also add fiber to your diet by eating some of the fiber-rich foods listed below.



Fruits

- 1 medium pear = 5.5 grams
- 1 medium apple = 4.4 grams
- ½ c. raspberries = 4.0 grams



Vegetables

- ½ c. cooked lentils = 7.8 grams
- ½ c. cooked kidney beans = 5.7 grams
- 1 baked potato (w/skin) = 4.6 grams
- ½ c. cooked peas = 4.4 grams
- ½ c. cooked spinach = 2.2 grams



Grains

- ½ c. 100% bran cereal = 9.1 grams
- 2 slices whole-wheat bread = 3.8 grams
- 2 slices rye bread = 2.9 grams
- ½ c. cooked brown rice = 1.8 grams



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Managing and Treating
Your Colon Condition

Understanding Your Condition

Your doctor has told you that you have **diverticular disease**. This problem involves pouches forming in the wall of your **colon** (large intestine). The problem may have been found by chance. Or, you may have had symptoms, such as severe pain. This booklet tells you more about diverticular disease and what can be done to treat it.

When Pouches Form

A healthy colon is a flexible tube lined with muscles. The colon absorbs water from stool (waste) and moves the stool out of your body. As you get older, small pouches called **diverticula** may form in the wall of your colon. This condition is called **diverticulosis**. It's not clear what causes the pouches. Research suggests that a low-fiber diet may play a role. Too little fiber can lead to hard stools and straining during bowel movements. Over time, this may increase the pressure in the colon and weaken the colon wall, causing diverticulosis. If a pouch becomes infected, the condition is called **diverticulitis**. The term diverticular disease refers to both conditions.

Working with Your Doctor

To learn more about your condition, your doctor will ask about your symptoms and health history. Tests, such as a CT scan or colonoscopy, may also be done. Based on the results, you and your doctor can then discuss your options. Diverticulosis generally doesn't require medical treatment. With an infected pouch, however, treatment is often needed, sometimes right away. Read on to learn more.

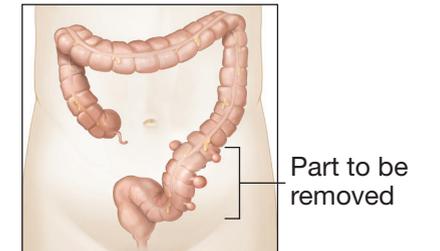


The Surgical Procedure

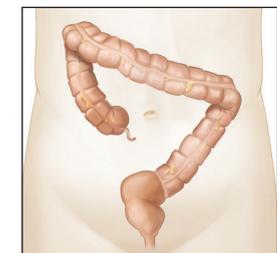
Surgery may be done through a single incision in the abdomen (open surgery). Or, it may be done using special instruments inserted through small incisions (laparoscopy). Most people who need surgery for diverticulitis have one-stage surgery. In severe cases, two-stage surgery may be done.

- **During one-stage surgery**, the affected part of the colon is removed. The healthy parts of the colon are then reconnected.
- **During two-stage surgery**, the affected part of the colon is removed. Then the end of the upper part of the colon is brought out through the wall of the abdomen. This opening (called a **stoma** or **colostomy**) is where stool now leaves the body. The stoma is needed only temporarily to give the colon time to heal. After 3 to 6 months, the second stage of the surgery is done to reconnect the ends of the colon, and the stoma is closed.

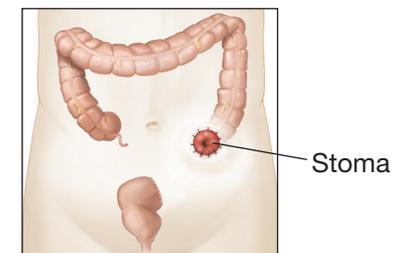
If you have a stoma, you'll be taught how to care for it before you leave the hospital. You'll continue to receive support for your stoma at home until the second stage of surgery is done.



First, the affected part of the colon is removed.



The healthy ends of the colon are then rejoined.



A stoma enables waste to pass out of the body.

When to Call the Doctor

Call your doctor right away if you have any of these signs or symptoms of a problem during recovery:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher
- Increased redness, bleeding, swelling, pain, or drainage around an incision site or stoma
- Chest pain or trouble breathing
- Worsening pain
- Persistent nausea or vomiting
- Severe constipation or diarrhea
- Bloody or black tarry stools



If Surgery Is Needed

When needed, surgery to remove part of the colon typically has very good results. Surgery may be done in one or two stages. Your doctor will talk with you about the type of surgery you'll have. Below you'll learn how to prepare for the procedure and what happens afterward. The next page explains how the surgery is done.

Your Surgery Experience

Your surgery will be done in a hospital or surgery center. Below are some things to expect before and after the procedure.

Preparing for Surgery

Before surgery, you may need to follow a clear liquid diet and drink a laxative solution. This clears your colon for the surgery. After you arrive at the hospital, you'll be prepped for surgery. You may be asked more than once to provide your name and the procedure you're having. This is for your safety. You'll be given an IV line to supply fluids and medications. You'll also be told about the anesthesia that keeps you free from pain during the surgery. You'll likely receive general anesthesia. This medication puts you into a state like deep sleep.

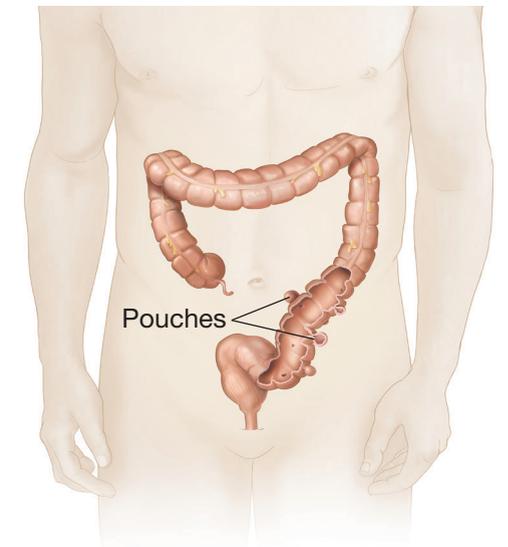
After Surgery

The IV will remain in place to deliver fluids and medications. Soon after surgery, you'll get up and walk around. This helps prevent blood clots and improves bowel function. The nurses will help you with breathing exercises to prevent pneumonia and other lung problems. You won't eat or drink anything until your colon begins working again. Once this happens, you'll start with a liquid diet, then gradually return to eating solid food. You may stay in the hospital from a few days up to a week.



Diverticulosis

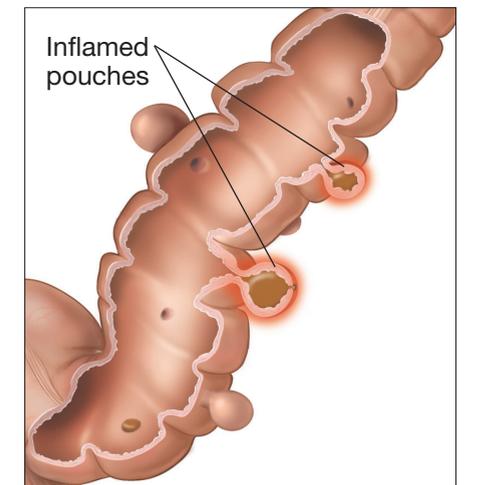
When pouches form in the wall of your colon, you have diverticulosis. This condition rarely causes symptoms. Rather, it is most often found during testing for other colon or digestive problems. Diverticulosis doesn't have a cure. But you can take steps to manage it. Your doctor may recommend certain diet changes. Medications are also prescribed in some cases.



Pouches can occur anywhere in the colon. They often cause no symptoms.

Diverticulitis

Diverticulitis occurs when one or more pouches become infected or inflamed. This may happen when a pouch forms a small hole or tear. The most common symptoms of diverticulitis are pain and tenderness in the lower abdomen. Fever, nausea, vomiting, constipation, and diarrhea can also occur. Diverticulitis can lead to serious complications, such as infection of the abdominal cavity or blockage of the colon. Treatment is usually needed to help relieve symptoms and prevent these complications.



Inflammation or infection of a pouch can develop suddenly. This can cause pain and other symptoms.

Diverticular Bleeding

In rare cases, small blood vessels in the diverticula break. This can cause bleeding in the colon. If the bleeding isn't controlled, it can threaten your health. If you notice any blood in your stool, even a small amount, tell your doctor right away.

Treating Your Condition

Reminder... Pouches don't go away, but you can take steps to keep your colon healthy. This may help reduce your risk for infection and painful symptoms.



If you have pouches but no symptoms, simple lifestyle changes may be enough to keep diverticulosis in check. If a pouch is infected, medical treatment is usually needed. In some cases of diverticulitis, this may include surgery. Your doctor will go over your options and work with you to plan the best treatment. Be sure to ask any questions you have.

Managing Diverticulosis

Once pouches form, they do not go away. So, diverticulosis has no cure. Instead, the goal is to keep your colon as healthy as possible. This may reduce your risk for future problems. You may be advised to:

- **Eat more fiber and drink more water.** Fiber absorbs water as it travels through the colon. This helps stool stay soft and move more smoothly. Foods high in fiber include vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Over-the-counter fiber supplements or bulking agents may also be recommended.
- **Be more active.** Frequent exercise may help make bowel movements more regular and may prevent constipation.
- **Avoid straining during bowel movements.** Straining increases pressure in the colon, which may encourage pouches to form.
- **Take medications.** Some cases of diverticulosis may require stool softeners or antispasmodic medications for pain. If you're prescribed medications, be sure to take them as directed.



If You Have Diverticulitis

If a pouch is inflamed or infected, treatment is often needed.

- **Mild diverticulitis** may be treated at home. You'll need to rest and take oral antibiotics. Also, you'll be on a liquid diet for a few days.
- **Moderate to severe diverticulitis** often requires treatment in the hospital. You'll be given fluids and antibiotics through an IV (intravenous) line. If your symptoms improve, you'll likely go home after a few days. You may need to continue taking antibiotics for the next week or two.

In most cases, treatment can clear the infection and inflammation. After recovering from a bout of diverticulitis, continue to manage your diverticulosis. This includes eating a high-fiber diet and following other recommendations described on page 4.

Surgery for Diverticulitis

In certain cases of severe diverticulitis, your doctor may recommend surgery to remove the affected part of the colon (**partial colon resection**). The decision to recommend surgery is based on a number of factors. These include the severity of your infection and symptoms and whether you've had repeated bouts of diverticulitis. Your age and overall health are also considered. If diverticulitis causes severe complications that threaten your health, emergency surgery may be needed. Your doctor can discuss the surgery with you and help you decide if it is your best treatment option.

Risks and Complications of Surgery

Surgery to remove part of the colon is generally a safe procedure, but it does have risks. These can include:

- Bleeding
- Infection
- Blood clots
- Injury to nearby organs
- Leaking or separation where the colon is reconnected
- Hernia at the incision site
- Risks of anesthesia

