

About DIVERTICULOSIS and DIVERTICULITIS



Information for Patients and Caregivers from the American College of Gastroenterology
Patient Care Committee



What is Diverticulosis?

Diverticulosis is a fairly common condition of the intestinal tract (gut). Diverticulosis refers to the presence of small out-pouchings (called diverticula) or sacs that can develop in the wall of the intestine. They resemble “pot holes” in the intestinal tract lining. The condition is uncommon in people under the age of 30 and is most common in those over 60.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Causes:** The exact reason diverticulosis occurs is not 100% certain but we do know it may bleed or become infected.
- **Symptoms:** Most people with diverticulosis have no problems. Some may experience pain or discomfort in the left lower abdomen, a gassy feeling, and/or a change in bowel habits, such as constipation or diarrhea.
- **Diagnosis:** Your doctor can discover diverticulosis with colonoscopy, barium enema, or CT scan, an X-ray test.
- **Prevention:** It is not known whether diverticulosis can be prevented. People who are overweight are more likely to have diverticulosis. Smoking may also increase the chance of developing diverticulosis. Maintaining a healthy weight and not smoking may prevent diverticulosis.

What are the complications of diverticulosis?

Diverticulitis is inflammation of one or a few diverticula in the colon. Diverticulitis occurs in less than 5 out of 100 people who have diverticulosis. People with diverticulitis typically have pain in the abdomen, usually on the lower left side. Other symptoms include fever, diarrhea and/or constipation, decreased appetite, nausea, and fatigue.

Complications of diverticulitis include:

- **Abscess** – a collection of infected fluid outside of the intestine wall.
- **Stricture** – a narrowing of the colon in the area of diverticulitis.
- **Fistula** – a connection between the bowel and nearby organs including the bladder.
- **Perforation** – a hole in the colon that allows bowel contents, such as stool, to leak into the abdomen. This is the most serious complication of diverticulitis.

How is diverticulitis treated?

Typical treatment of diverticulitis may include antibiotics and a liquid diet or light diet until symptoms improve. Some studies suggest that patients with mild diverticulitis who do not have complications, and who are otherwise healthy, can be managed without antibiotics. People with severe diverticulitis (high fever and/or signs of severe infection) or with complications, require antibiotics and are usually treated in the hospital.

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