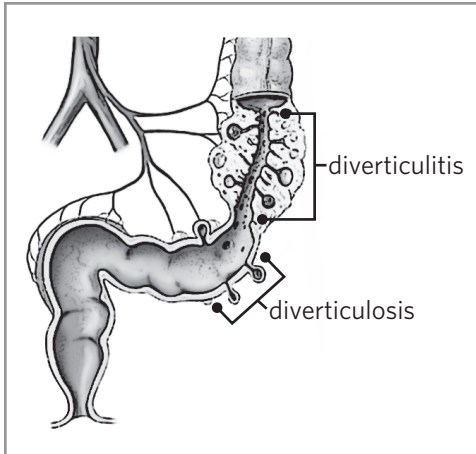


# Diverticular Disease



**Diverticular disease affects your colon, also called your large intestine.** There are two types of diverticular disease—diverticulosis and diverticulitis.

*Diverticulosis* develops over time when extra pressure from hard stools or straining from constipation causes tiny pockets or pouches to form in the lining of your colon.

*Diverticulitis* can happen if the tiny pockets or pouches become blocked with waste, and bacteria builds up and causes infection or inflammation (swelling).

## Symptoms

With diverticulosis, you may not have any symptoms, or you might have tenderness or cramps in your abdomen. If you're having a flare-up of diverticulitis, you may have the following symptoms:

- **pain in your abdomen**
- **chills or fever**
- **vomiting or feeling sick to your stomach**
- **change in frequency, color, texture or shape of your bowel movements**

Talk to your doctor right away if you notice any of these symptoms. If they become severe, they may be signs of a complication and need treatment at a hospital.

## Treatment

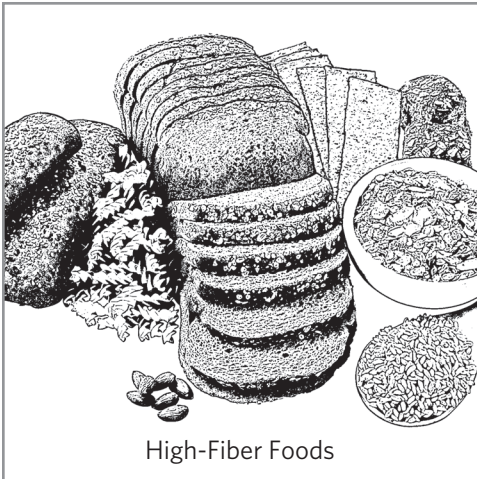
If you have diverticular disease, the goals of treatment are to get relief from symptoms and to prevent flare-ups. You'll work with your doctor to make a treatment plan that may include:

- **Changes to your diet**—A high-fiber diet may help ease diverticulosis and prevent attacks of diverticulitis. Fiber keeps stool soft so you can pass waste easily through your colon, without a lot of straining. But if you're having a flare-up of diverticulitis, you may need to change to a low-fiber or liquid diet to give your colon time to rest (see below).
- **Pain relievers**—Your doctor may suggest medicines like acetaminophen to help ease discomfort.
- **Antibiotics**—During a flare-up of diverticulitis, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to clear up the infection.

If you're thinking about using laxatives to help constipation, talk to your doctor first. Some laxatives can be unsafe and may interfere with other medicines you're taking.

## Eating During a Flare-up

If you're having a diverticulitis attack, you'll need to give your colon a chance to rest while your doctor treats the infection. Your doctor may suggest a clear liquid diet for 2 to 3 days. This includes broth, clear soda, water and plain gelatin. Once your symptoms begin to go away, slowly add low-fiber foods back into your diet. Low-fiber foods include eggs, white bread or rice, milk, yogurt and cheese. Once the symptoms are gone, build back up to your daily high-fiber diet. See p. 2 for ideas.



High-Fiber Foods

To learn more, visit:

- **Cleveland Clinic**  
[www.clevelandclinic.org](http://www.clevelandclinic.org)
- **Medline Plus**  
[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov)
- **National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse**  
[www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov)

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## Making Lifestyle Changes

Follow these tips to help prevent diverticulosis and attacks of diverticulitis:

- **Add more fiber to your diet**—You get fiber from plant foods like fruits, vegetables, grains and beans. Aim to get between 21 to 38 grams of fiber a day. You can get more fiber in your diet with these tips:
  - Eat whole-wheat bread and cook with whole-grain pasta.
  - Choose breakfast cereals with at least 5 grams of fiber and top them with berries.
  - Have an apple or a handful of carrot sticks for an afternoon snack.
- **Add fiber to your diet slowly**—This will give your body time to adjust and ease bloating and gas. Talk to your doctor about fiber supplements if you're having trouble eating high fiber foods.
- **Don't ignore the urge**—Putting off bowel movements can lead to harder stool that you have to strain to pass. Go when the urge strikes, even if it means going in a more public bathroom than you'd like.
- **Drink plenty of fluids with your fiber**—Fiber makes your stool soft by absorbing water in your colon. If you don't drink enough, fiber can make you constipated. To remind yourself to drink, buy a washable, refillable bottle. Keep filling it up with water and other liquids, and take it with you wherever you go.
- **Keep a food journal**—Write down what you eat and if you have any symptoms. If certain foods trigger symptoms, try to avoid them.

## Remember:

- Talk to your doctor if you notice any signs of a diverticulitis flare-up. Without treatment, diverticulitis can lead to complications that may require a hospital stay.
- Prevention plays an important role in your treatment plan. Even if you already have diverticulosis, you can still take steps to prevent attacks of diverticulitis.
- Add fiber to your diet slowly, and always drink plenty of water.