

Diverticular disease and diverticulitis

Dietary advice for
patients

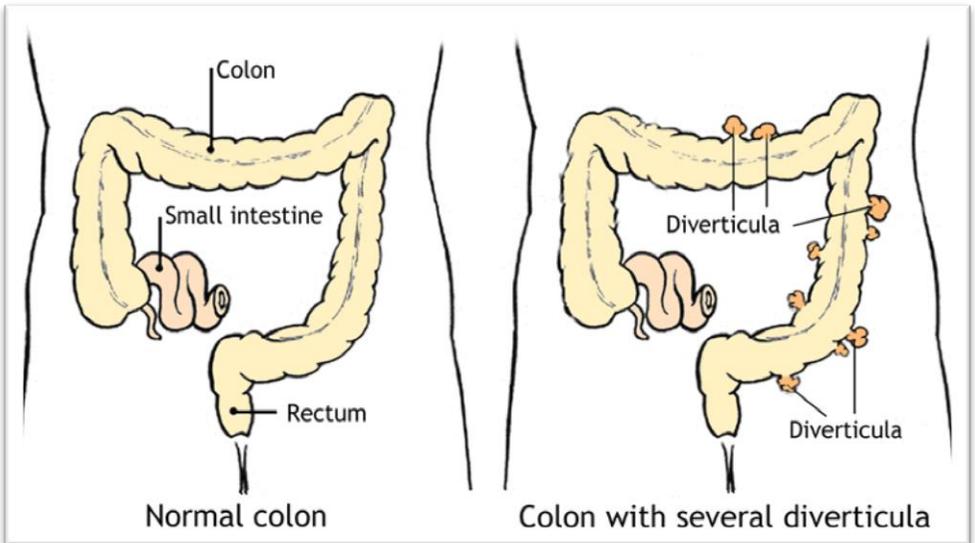
Introduction

This booklet answers common questions about managing diverticular disease and diverticulitis. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to ask your doctor or dietitian.

Diverticular disease

Diverticular disease and diverticulitis are related digestive conditions that affect the large intestine (bowel). Small pouches form in the muscle wall of the bowel; these are known as diverticula.

Diverticula are common and are associated with getting older as the large intestine becomes weaker with age. The risk of developing diverticula also increases if you tend to be constipated; as the hard stool puts extra pressure on the intestinal wall.



Common symptoms:

- Tummy pain (usually lower left side, may get worse during or shortly after eating)
- Feeling bloated
- Constipation and/or diarrhoea
- Occasionally mucus in the stool

Diverticulitis

If one or more of the diverticula becomes inflamed or infected, causing more severe symptoms, it is called diverticulitis.

You may:

- Experience constant, more severe tummy pain
- Have a high temperature of 38°C or above
- Feel nauseous or vomit
- Feel generally tired and/or unwell
- Notice blood in the stool and/or bleeding from your bottom (rectal bleeding)

Dietary management

Fibre

Fibre is the roughage found in fruit, vegetable, lentils and pulses as well as wholegrains. There are two types of fibre:

1. Insoluble fibre which adds bulk to the stool and acts as a brush to clean the gut.
2. Soluble fibre which helps to absorb fluid and soften the stool.

Diverticular disease

A diet **high in fibre** is beneficial in diverticular disease because it helps to increase stool frequency. It also absorbs water which helps to soften the stool, making it easier to pass.

This reduces pressure on the wall of the large intestine and decreases the risk of developing diverticulitis.

Diverticulitis

If you are being treated for an episode of diverticulitis, you might be asked to follow **a low fibre diet** for a period of time, in order to improve bowel symptoms (specifically, low insoluble fibre).

In most cases a low fibre diet is required only temporarily, although some individuals may need to follow it indefinitely. Please seek guidance from your doctor or dietitian.

High and low fibre foods

The **fibre reference table** at the end of this booklet provides a useful guide to selecting either high or low fibre foods. The most appropriate option will depend on the symptoms and stage of your diverticular disease.

Increasing fibre intake

A sudden increase in fibre can cause problems such as wind or bloating. To avoid this it is suggested that you increase the fibre content of your diet gradually, over a period of days.

Fluid

Fibre works to reduce constipation by absorbing water in the large intestine, forming a soft bulk that is easy to pass when you go to the toilet. Therefore, it is very important that you ensure you drink plenty alongside increasing your fibre intake.

Aim to have 1.5-2 litres (six to eight cups) of fluid a day. Water, squash, tea, coffee, fruit juice, carbonated drinks and milk can all count towards your fluid intake.

Large amounts of fruit juice and sugary drinks are not recommended. They can lead to excessive energy intake and weight gain, and can cause damage to your teeth.

You should also avoid having fizzy drinks during episodes of diverticulitis, as these might make your symptoms of pain and/or bloating worse.

Exercise

Regular exercise should also help to regulate your bowel function and help maintain a healthy weight. Please speak to your GP before increasing your activity levels.

Nutritional support

It is important to maintain a varied, balanced diet especially if you follow a low fibre diet for more than a few weeks. A general multivitamin and mineral supplement might be useful if you need to follow a low fibre diet for more than one to two weeks.

If you have a poor appetite you should aim to eat three small regular meals, with two to three snacks in between. Consuming nourishing drinks during the day may also be recommended if appetite is reduced.

If you notice weight loss, speak to your dietitian about ways to increase your calorie and protein intake to ensure adequate nutrition.

Fibre reference table

Bread, cereal and flour based products

High fibre foods	Low fibre foods
<p>Wholemeal/ granary/ rye bread, chapatti and pitta bread, fibre enriched bread, All fruit/ nut breads, including walnut, granary or fruit muffins or scones and pastries with fruit/ dried fruit</p>	<p>White bread, English muffins, plain scones/ croissants/ bagels without dried fruits, crumpets, pancakes, white pitta and naan bread, white chapatti and tortillas, poppadums, Yorkshire pudding, dumplings</p>
<p>Wholegrain cereals, such as Weetabix®, All Bran®, porridge oats, muesli, bran,</p>	<p>Refined breakfast cereal, such as Special K®, Cornflakes® and Rice Krispies® with no dried fruit/nuts</p>
<p>Brown rice, pasta, couscous, pearl barley, quinoa, bulgur wheat, oatmeal, wholegrain noodles</p>	<p>White rice, pasta, noodles, tapioca, semolina</p>
<p>Brown, wholemeal or granary flour, wheat germ</p>	<p>Corn/white flour</p>
<p>Wholegrain, wholewheat or fruit/ nut biscuits eg fig rolls, garibaldi, oat biscuits, flapjacks, digestives, fruit cake, rye crispbreads</p>	<p>Plain biscuits such as rich tea, custard creams Plain crackers Plain sponge cakes</p>

Vegetables

High fibre foods	Low fibre foods
<p>All raw vegetables Avoid all other vegetables not listed in 'allowed' list including artichoke, avocado, cabbage, curly kale, celery, fennel, leeks, okra, peppers, peas, mature spinach, sprouts, sweetcorn, yam, cassava, salad/ roast/ croquette potato and chips</p>	<p>Flesh only (no peel/skin, seeds or stalks) Cooked, boiled/ mashed potato, sweet potato, pumpkin/squash, courgette</p> <p>Cauliflower and broccoli tips, asparagus tips, aubergine, carrot, swede, beetroot sieved tomato sauces/ tinned tomatoes, including Passata and tomato puree Strained vegetable juices</p> <p>Salad: Skinless and seedless cucumber, tomato; shredded lettuce, young spinach, rocket (chew thoroughly)</p>

Milk and dairy

High fibre foods	Low fibre foods
<p>Any dairy products containing fruit, nuts, seeds or cereals</p>	<p>All types of milk and milk alternatives,</p> <p>Dairy products including cream, sour cream, crème fraiche, fromage frais, smooth yoghurt with no nuts or fruit, most cheeses</p>

Fruit

High fibre Foods	Low fibre foods
Fruit with skin, pips or of a very 'fibrous' texture - eg apples, pears, pineapple and citrus fruit	Flesh only (no peel/ skin, seeds) Pawpaw and melons banana (ripe), seedless grapes
Canned pineapple and prunes	Peeled/ canned/ stewed or well-cooked peaches,
Berries and currants	nectarine, apple, pear, plums, fruit cocktail, mango, lychees, apricot
Dried fruit	
Smoothies	Canned fruits except pineapple/ prunes

Meat, legumes and nuts

High fibre foods	Low fibre foods
All beans, lentils and chickpeas	Any tender, soft meat, chicken and fish
All nuts including coconut	Tofu
All seeds (eg pumpkin, chia, sunflower and sesame seeds)	Eggs
Plant based protein powders (pea protein, flaxseed protein)	

Drinks

High fibre foods	Low fibre foods
Fruit and vegetable juices with pulp, prune juice	Strained fruit and vegetable juices (no pulp), milk and milk alternatives, water, soft drinks, tea and coffee, herbal teas
Fruit and vegetable smoothies	

Miscellaneous

High fibre foods	Low fibre foods
Soup with vegetable pieces such as minestrone	Smooth or sieved soup
Desserts and puddings containing nuts and fruit with skins, chocolate with dried fruit, nuts or seeds, coconut	Sugar, honey, golden syrup, custard powder, boiled sweets, mints, toffee, caramel, marshmallows, chocolate
Jam or marmalade with skin, peel or pips	Seedless jam and marmalade, Marmite, smooth nut butter
Wholegrain mustard, pickles, relish, chutney, hummus,	Gravy, ketchup, soy sauce
Corn chips, popcorn	All fats including butter, oil or margarine
	Plain crisps, plain pretzels (without sesame seeds)
	Sorbet, ice cream, jelly
	Pepper, salt, herbs and spices in moderation (dried or finely chopped), Bovril®, OXO®, miso soup with no seaweed

Notes

More information

For more information about the gastroenterology service at the Royal Free London, please visit:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/gastroenterology.

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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