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References:

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DIVERTICULAR DISEASE

PATIENT INFORMATION BOOKLET

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What is diverticular disease?

Diverticular disease of the colon is a condition which occurs when there is a protrusion of the inner lining of the intestine through the outer muscular coat to form a small pouch with a narrow neck, otherwise known as diverticulum, or diverticula if there are more than one.



Normal Intestine or Colon



Diverticula

Facts about fibre

- **FIBRE** - may play a part in appetite and weight control.
- **FIBRE** - can slow down the rate of digestion leaving you feeling satisfied for longer.
- **FIBRE** - a low fat, high fibre diet can lower cholesterol levels and the risk of heart disease.
- **FIBRE** - promotes regularity and may prevent disorders of the digestive system.
- **FIBRE** - helps reduce risk of bowel cancer.
- **FIBRE** - might help reduce the risk of breast cancer.
- **FIBRE** - helps in treating and preventing constipation.
- **FIBRE** - helps people with diabetes control their blood sugar levels.

Treatment

- Following investigations and confirmation of diagnosis, reassurance that a more serious disorder is not present can be provided.
- Prevention of recurrent attacks of diverticulitis can be reduced by ensuring that you maintain a healthy balanced diet.
The government recommendation is 18g of fibre in our diet each day. Cereals, whole wheat bread, fruit and vegetables are all good sources of fibre.
- It is very uncommon for an operation to be necessary but surgery may be undertaken to remove the affected segment of bowel for recurrent episodes of diverticulitis.
- Although rare emergency surgery may be required if complications occur ie. Abscess formation, perforation, bleeding fistula formation and narrowing or stricture.
- Very occasionally it may be necessary to bring a piece of bowel out onto the skin to empty into a bag (colostomy).

What causes diverticular disease?

Diverticula are thought to be caused by an increase in pressure in the bowel. However, while the mechanism that weakens the wall is unclear, a high refined diet is believed to be a contributing factor. Diverticular disease has been described as a disease of western industrial civilisation and as a consequence of refined food where the intake of fibre has decreased.

How common is diverticular disease?

In the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia prevalence has risen from 5% to 50%. Diverticular disease also increases with age, occurring in 10% of people in their forties and rising to more than two thirds of people in their eighties. In Britain, over half of the healthy population aged over seventy years old have diverticula of the large intestine (colon).

Is diverticular disease harmful?

Diverticular disease is a very common condition which in the vast majority of cases is not harmful.

Uncomplicated (Diverticulosis)

Is characterised by the presence of diverticula without inflammation.

Complicated (Diverticulitis)

Encompasses all the events related to inflammation, abscess formation, perforation, bleeding, fistula formation and narrowing of the bowel.

What are the symptoms?

It is unusual for people with diverticular disease to have many symptoms but they can be similar to irritable bowel syndrome:

- PAIN - usually in left lower part of the abdomen.
- Abdominal distension (swelling).
- Irregular bowel habit with small hard pellet like stools.

Occasionally bleeding can occur with bowel action.

Complications are RARE but if they occur you may experience generalised pain, excessive bleeding and/ or a high temperature. If this occurs please contact your GP.

How is diverticular disease diagnosed?

- **DIVERTICULA**
BARIUM ENEMA (XRAY)
SIGMOIDOSCOPY or COLONOSCOPY

These investigations are usually requested when a patient has rectal bleeding, abdominal pain, and/or a change in bowel habit.

Both investigations are able to detect the presence of diverticula in the bowel. The muscle abnormality of diverticular disease is shown by increased folding of the lining in the lower left (Sigmoid) colon.

- **DIVERTICULITIS**

Is usually diagnosed when there is a history of tenderness in the region of the diverticula and blood tests show evidence of inflammation somewhere in the body.