

Diverticulosis / Diverticulitis

Endoscopy Department

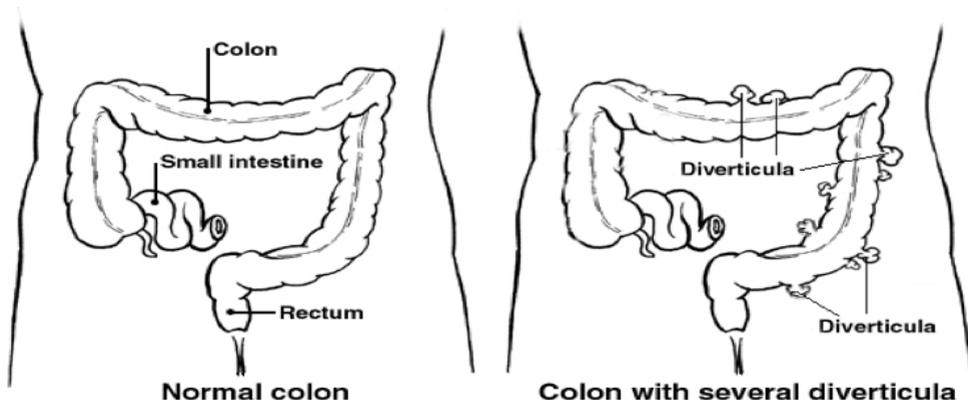


Patient information leaflet

You will only be given this leaflet if you have been diagnosed with Diverticulosis and / or Diverticulitis. The information below outlines the conditions, the causes and the treatment.

What is Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis?

A diverticulum is a small pouch with a narrow neck that sticks out from the wall of the large intestine / bowel. Diverticula mean more than one diverticulum. They can develop on any part of the gut, but usually occur in the colon (sometimes called the large bowel or large intestine). They most commonly develop in the section of the colon leading towards the back passage called the sigmoid colon. This is where the stools (faeces) are becoming more solid. This is on the left-hand side of the abdomen. Several diverticula may develop over time.



Why does it occur?

Diverticula are common. They become more common with increasing age. About half of all people in the UK have diverticula by the time they are 50 years old. Nearly 7 in 10 have diverticula by the time they are 80 years old. The reason why diverticula develop is probably related to not eating enough fibre. Fibre is the part of food that is not digested. Your gut intestine moves stools faeces along with gentle squeezes of its muscular wall. The stools tend to be drier, smaller, and more difficult to move along if you don't eat much fibre. High pressure may develop in parts of your gut when it squeezes hard stools. The increased pressure may push the inner lining of a small area of your gut through the muscle wall to form a small diverticulum.

What are the symptoms?

In about 3 in 4 people who develop diverticula, the diverticula cause no harm or symptoms, therefore, the condition may not be known about. Some people experience persistent abdominal symptoms such as pain, often quite low down in the left side of the abdomen, together with bloating and an irregular bowel habit. Patients may be constipated whilst others have diarrhoea. Some have an irregular bowel habit with constipation for a period followed by days when they have diarrhoea. Nevertheless, the pattern of symptoms does vary from one person to the next.

What are the complications/risks?

Complications from diverticula are fairly uncommon:

Diverticulitis

When a diverticulum or several diverticula become inflamed, this leads to diverticulitis. This can cause pain, fever and feeling of being generally unwell.

Obstruction, abscess, perforation and fistula

An infected diverticulum can sometimes get worse and cause a hole (perforation), a blockage (obstruction), a channel (fistula) or a collection of pus (abscess). This will need urgent medical attention.

Bleeding

A diverticulum can sometimes bleed. The bleeding is usually sudden and painless. It is caused by a burst blood vessel within the wall of the diverticulum.

The above mentioned complications are rare to happen. But all of them require urgent medical attention and treatment.

What does treatment / management involve?

Keeping the stools relatively soft and bulky may reduce the likelihood of more diverticula developing and may reduce the risk that hard pellets of faeces lodge within the pouches. In principle a diet high in plant fibre achieves both aims. Try to eat a mixture of high fibre foods, include plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Aim to have at least one high fibre food with each meal and try to have five portions of fruit or vegetables each day. Drink at least two litres (eight to ten cups) of fluid every day.

Medical treatment?

There is no specific treatment for persistent pain, bloating or an irregular bowel habit. The dietary measures described above may be helpful. Laxatives can be used to keep stools soft and regular.

Risks: Please speak to your doctor, GP or pharmacist before commencing new medications.

Are there any alternative treatments / management?

The only treatments available currently are listed above.

When is medical attention required?

You should go to the doctor if unexpectedly severe pain and tenderness occur in the lower abdomen, especially if you feel you may have a temperature. This might indicate that your diverticula have become inflamed and that you have developed diverticulitis.

Reference source

- www.corecharity.co.uk/
- www.patient.co.uk

Contact details

If you require further information or advice, please feel free to contact us.

Endoscopy Unit

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 4409 (8am–6pm, Monday to Friday)

During out of hours, advice can be obtained from your local accident and emergency department or GP.

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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