

# **DIVERTICULOSIS**

## **What you should know:**

- Diverticulosis occurs when small pouches, called diverticula bulge outward through weak spots in the large bowel (colon). The pouches form when pressure builds up inside the colon. Constipation (dry, hard stools), due to a low fiber diet, is a common cause of increased pressure in the colon. The colon is the long tube that connects the small bowel with the anus (rear end). The colon absorbs water from digested foods and turns the digested food into stool. It stores the stool until it can be passed out through your anus.
- Feces (stool) or food that is not broken down can get trapped in the diverticula. This can cause abdominal (stomach) pain, bleeding, and other problems, such as diverticulitis (infected and swollen diverticula). A barium enema or colonoscopy may be done to diagnose diverticulosis. You may also have blood and stool tests. Treatment may include a high fiber diet, pain medicines, fiber or vitamin supplements, or surgery. With treatment, such as a high fiber diet, your symptoms may be relieved and serious problems, such as diverticulitis, may be prevented.

## **After You Leave:**

- Keep a written list of your medicines you take, the amounts, and when and why you take them. Bring the list of your medicines or pills when you see your caregivers. Learn why you take each medicine. Ask your caregiver for information about your medicine. Do not use any medicines, over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, herbs, or food supplements without first talking to caregivers.
- Always take your medicine as directed by caregivers. Call your caregiver if you think your medicines are not helping or if you feel you are having side effects. Do not quit taking your medicines until you discuss it with your caregiver. If you are taking medicine that makes you drowsy, do not drive or use heavy equipment.

## **Follow Up Visit information:**

- Keep all appointments. Write down any questions you may have. This way you will remember to ask these questions during your next visit.

**Bowel movements:**

- These are also called BM's or having a stool. You may be constipated with diverticulosis, but do not strain or push down hard while having a BM. Check your stool to see if it is black or has blood in it. If you need to use a laxative, use bulk-forming laxatives, which make the stool bigger and softer. Call your caregiver if you are constipated or bleeding.

**Diet:**

- Avoid eating red meat and foods that are not easy to digest:

Decreasing red meat in your diet may help prevent more diverticula from forming. Caregivers may tell you not to eat foods that are hard to digest such as corn, nuts, and seeds.

- Drink 8-10 (eight ounce) cups of liquid each day:

Good liquids to drink are water, fruit juices, and milk. Limit the amount of caffeine you drink, such as that found in coffee, tea, soda, and sports drinks.

- Eat more fiber:

High fiber foods, such as fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains soften stools. This helps stool pass more quickly through your colon. Be sure to add fiber slowly into your diet to avoid bloating, abdominal pain, and gas.

- Use special cookbooks:

These cookbooks may provide recipes that may prevent or help your diverticulosis. Ask your caregiver for more information about a high fiber diet.

**Wellness Hints:**

- Exercise: Work with your caregiver to plan the best exercise program for you. Exercise helps your bowels work better and reduces pressure inside your colon. Try to exercise at least 10 minutes everyday.
- Quit smoking: it is never too late to quit smoking. Smoking harms the heart, lungs and the blood. You are more likely to have heart attack, lung disease, and cancer if you smoke. You will help yourself and those around you by not smoking. Ask your caregiver for more information about how to stop smoking if you are having trouble quitting.
- Stress: stress may slow healing and cause illness later. Since it is hard to avoid stress, learn to control it. Learn new ways to relax, such as deep breathing,

meditation, relaxing muscles, music, or biofeedback. Talk to someone about things that upset you.

For support and more information: You may feel scared, confused, and anxious because you have diverticulosis. These feelings are common. Talk about these feelings with your caregiver or with someone close to you. Contact the following for more information.

- National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC)  
2 Information Way  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3570  
1-800-891-5389  
[www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov)
- International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders  
P.o. box 170864  
Milwaukee, WI 53217  
1-414-964-1799  
1-888-964-2001  
[www.iffdg.org](http://www.iffdg.org)

**Seek Care Immediately If:**

- You have abdominal (stomach) cramps that get worse or do not go away
- You have signs of diverticulitis, such as fever or severe pain in the lower left abdomen (stomach)
- You have black or bright red stools

**Care agreement:**

You have the right to help plan your care. To help with this plan, you must learn about your health condition and how it may be treated. You can then discuss treatment options with your caregivers. Work with them to decide what care may be used to treat you. You always have the right to refuse treatment.