

Diverticulosis- What Is this Digestive Condition?

Diverticulosis is the name of a condition that is caused when small pouches known as diverticula form in the walls of the colon. The pouches themselves do not cause symptoms, and 80 percent of people who develop them never develop diverticulitis, which is the painful inflammation of these pouches caused when particles enter into them. A commonly associated condition is known as painful diverticular disease and is believed to be a combination of diverticulosis and irritable bowel syndrome. The effects of the disease include painful cramping of the abdomen, particularly on the left side.

The cause of diverticulosis is not entirely known, though many doctors believe that the tiny pouches form when high pressure within the colon pushes on weaker parts of the colon wall. One of the biggest causes of this pressure is a diet that is low in fiber. A low fiber diet will mean that stool remains in the bowel longer and that more pressure will be required for the stool to pass. High fiber diets allow stool to move easily through the colon, helping to substantially lower the risk of developing this condition. When weak spots in the colon contain blood vessels and are subjected to this pressure, it is believed that these small pockets can be formed.

Diagnosis of diverticulosis is typically made following certain tests. X-rays that use an enema of barium are commonly used to detect the condition, as are colonoscopies. Because the condition of diverticulosis itself causes no symptoms, it is often only while searching for other conditions that the problem is diagnosed. The most common reason these pouches are detected is when they become infected and diverticulitis develops, which causes significant pain. Chronic diverticular problems mimic the symptoms of IBS, such as cramping pain and diarrhea in the absence of fever or infection, making it harder to diagnose.

When diverticulosis is caught through testing or through the suspicions of your doctor, you will be encouraged to eat a high fiber diet to help treat and combat the situation. Adding leafy vegetables, grains, and fruits can help boost your fiber levels, and

ingesting plenty of water will help to prevent constipation. Fiber supplements can also prove to be quite beneficial. By maintaining this treatment regimen, you can help prevent new diverticula, or pouches, from forming, making the condition less likely to develop into painful diverticulitis.

When painful diverticular disease develops, treatment is often very similar to the treatment for IBS. While adding fiber and better hydration to the system is certainly recommended, there are other steps that can be taken to make the condition less painful. This includes eliminating foods that cause gas or pain in the abdomen from the diet. Careful monitoring of your diet and notations of what foods are eaten before symptoms appear can help you learn to identify your triggers for flare ups. When you know which foods serve to make your condition worse, it can be much easier to create a diet that eliminates them.

Because of the location and symptoms associated with complications of diverticulosis, it is always important to be checked for colon cancer if rectal bleeding is present. Your doctor will be able to quickly rule out this possibility and to treat you for whatever condition is inflaming or infecting the diverticula. While there is little that can be done to eliminate existing diverticula, dietary changes can often stop the condition from becoming worse and prevent new pockets from forming. Diverticulitis affects approximately 20 percent of people with diverticulosis, but approximately eighty percent of people who have the condition never experience any symptoms or side effects.