

Introduction to Diverticular Disease

Have you ever heard of diverticular disease? This sheet features a quick rundown of all the basics you need to know.

Diverticular disease affects the colon, which is part of the large intestine. People get diverticular disease when small sacs are created in weak spots in the colon. These sacs push outward and are usually found in the lower colon, which is also known as the sigmoid colon. These pouches are called diverticula, and they are at the heart of diverticular disease.

Diverticular disease occurs when the diverticula become irritated, swollen, or inflamed, which in turn leads to infection (diverticulitis) or prompts a blood vessel in a diverticulum to burst (diverticular bleeding). When the diverticula cause neither diverticulitis nor diverticular bleeding, the condition is called diverticulosis.

The symptoms of diverticulosis include bloating, cramps in the lower abdomen, or pain in the lower abdomen. The symptoms of diver-

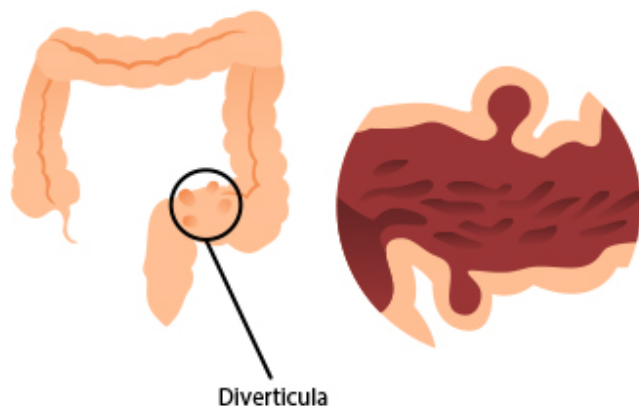
ticular disease can be more severe. According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, "People with diverticulitis may have many symptoms, the most common of which is pain in the lower left side of the abdomen. The pain is usually severe and comes on suddenly, though it can also be mild and then worsen over several days. The intensity of the pain can fluctuate." Other symptoms can include constipation, fever, diarrhea, chills, and diverticular bleeding. Diverticular bleeding can lead to red or maroon-colored blood in the stool and can also prompt cramps, dizziness, light-headedness, and/or weakness.

The cause of diverticular disease is unknown. A low-fiber diet has been linked to incidences of diverticular disease, but a concrete causal relationship has not been established. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases maintains, "Studies have also found links between diverticular disease and obesity, lack of exercise, smoking, and certain medications including non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as aspirin, and steroids."

Diverticular disease generally occurs in older adults above age 50, but has recently been cropping up in younger men as well.

To learn more about diverticular disease, check out the home pages for the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, the United States National Library of Medicine, or the National Center for Biotechnology Information.

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