

Diet and diverticular disease

This advice sheet gives some general information on the dietary changes you may want to make if you have diverticular disease. If you need more detailed advice or if you are following a special diet that you think may make it difficult or unsafe to make these changes, then please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.

What is diverticular disease?

Diverticular disease is a condition where small bulges or pockets (known as diverticula) develop in the wall of the large intestine (also known as the colon or large bowel). Diverticula are common and become more common with increasing age. Symptoms may include constipation, diarrhoea, bloating, pain in your stomach, and/or rectal bleeding or mucus.

What is diverticulitis?

If you have diverticular disease, you may develop diverticulitis. Diverticulitis is where one or more of the pockets in the large intestine (the diverticula) become inflamed or infected. This may cause you to feel especially tired and unwell. Symptoms may include constant severe stomach pain, a high temperature, change in bowel habit, painful urination, increased urinary frequency and/or rectal bleeding.

Reducing your risk of developing diverticular disease and diverticulitis:

The large intestine becomes weaker with age and the pressure of hard stools passing through the large intestine is thought to cause the formation of diverticula. Following a healthy balanced diet high in fibre, and making sure you drink lots of fluid can make your stools easier to pass and should reduce the risk of diverticula developing.

Fibre:

Fibre (sometimes known as roughage) is found in plant based food products. Fibre gets completely or partially broken down in the large intestine. A food product is 'high fibre' if it contains at least 6g of fibre per 100g. This information can often be found on the nutrition labels on the back or side of food packaging. Good sources of fibre:

- **Cereals and other starchy carbohydrates** such as bran flakes, porridge, wholewheat breakfast cereals, and wholemeal or wholegrain pasta, rice, bread, crackers and biscuits
- **Fruits and vegetables** such as broccoli, sweetcorn, cabbage, onion, apple, raspberries, blackberries, plums, and prunes
- **Nuts and seeds** such as almonds, peanuts, linseeds, hazelnuts, and sunflower seeds
- **Peas, beans and pulses** such as baked beans, kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, hummus, dhal, and peas

Aim to eat at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables a day as part of a healthy balanced diet. A portion is 80 grams. Fresh, frozen, dried and canned all count.

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Slowly increase the amount of fibre you eat. Increasing the amount of fibre in your diet too quickly can cause bloating and wind.

For a more comprehensive list of high fibre foods, ask your healthcare professional for our information sheet on a 'High Fibre Diet'.

Fluid:

Drinking plenty of fluids is important when you are increasing your fibre intake. Fibre soaks up fluid and draws water into your stools to keep them soft and bulky, which can help to pass them easily. Without enough fluid, fibre does not work properly. Aim to have 6 to 8 cups (1.5 to 2 litres) of fluid each day. Good sources of fluid include water, tea, coffee, juice, squash, and soup.

Wheat bran: We do not recommend adding wheat bran to food, as this can be difficult to digest.

Should I avoid nuts and seeds?

It is often recommended that people with diverticular disease avoid seeds, nuts, corn, popcorn and tomatoes. However, there is no proof that this is needed or helpful. So only avoid these foods if they cause you to have symptoms.

What should I eat if I develop diverticulitis?

It is usually recommended that whilst the diverticula are inflamed you reduce your fibre intake to help the large intestine recover. Once your symptoms improve, you can gradually return to a high fibre diet.

How to reduce your fibre intake:

- Choose food products that contain less than 3g of fibre per 100g. This information can often be found on the nutrition labels on the back or side of food packaging.
- Avoid whole-grain food products and choose white bread, crackers, pasta and rice
- Choose cakes, puddings and pastries made with white flour and avoid those with added fruit or nuts
- Choose plain biscuits for example rich tea.
- Choose breakfast cereals not high in fibre such as rice pops and cornflakes
- Remove the skins, stalks and/or pith from vegetables and fruit, and limit to 2 portions of each a day

For a more comprehensive list of foods, ask your healthcare professional for our information sheet on a 'Low Fibre Diet'.

Other sources of information:

NHS Choices website <https://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx>