

## Facts about Diverticulitis

**Diverticuli** are tiny "pockets" of weakness in the wall of the large intestine. This condition is called **diverticulosis**, and a third of the people over age 50 in the United States have it. Some have just a few diverticuli, while others may have 20 or more. Most people have no symptoms and only find out that they have diverticulosis when they have a colonoscopy.

**Diverticulitis** is infection/inflammation of the diverticuli. In other words, a person with diverticulosis may get diverticulitis when stool gets caught in one or more of these "pockets", and they become inflamed or infected. This typically causes fever, pain and tenderness in the abdomen. The two major signs of diverticular disease are bleeding and infection.

Diverticulitis usually clears up within a week with antibiotics and a liquid or soft diet. (A soft diet includes anything that does not require a lot of chewing: soup, mashed potatoes, cooked or pureed vegetables, bananas, Jell-O and pudding fit this category.) After the acute infection clears up, patients should eat a high-fiber diet whole grains, fruits and vegetables. They should drink plenty of fluids and avoid constipation at all costs, even if that requires taking Metamucil (psyllium seed) or other fiber products daily. Hard stools or straining will cause more diverticuli to appear or the existing ones to enlarge.

### What causes diverticular disease?

Although not proven, the dominant theory is that a low-fiber diet is the main cause of diverticular disease. The disease was first noticed in the United States in the early 1900s. At about the same time, processed foods were introduced into the American diet. Many processed foods contain refined, low-fiber flour. Unlike whole-wheat flour, refined flour has no wheat bran.

Diverticular disease is common in developed or industrialized countries - particularly the United States, England, and Australia - where low-fiber diets are common. The disease is rare in countries of Asia and Africa, where people eat high-fiber vegetable diets.

Fiber is the part of fruits, vegetables, and grains that the body cannot digest. Some fiber dissolves easily in water (soluble fiber). It takes on a soft, jelly-like texture in the intestines. Some fiber passes almost unchanged through the intestines (insoluble fiber). Both kinds of fiber help make stools soft and easy to pass. Fiber also prevents constipation.

Constipation makes the muscles strain to move stool that is too hard. It is the main cause of increased pressure in the colon. This excess pressure might cause the weak spots in the colon to bulge out and become diverticula.

Diverticulitis occurs when diverticula become infected or inflamed. Doctors are not certain what causes the infection. It may begin when stool or bacteria are caught in the diverticula. An attack of diverticulitis can develop suddenly and without warning.

Anything that could become lodged in the pockets formed in the large intestine can cause a problem. Seeds and popcorn are the biggest threat.

The colon will heal over time but if material keeps lodging in the diverticuli, they will not heal. A high fiber diet is the best way to try to get the colon to heal but you want to stay away from wheat.

Your gastroenterologist probably gave you a list of foods to avoid and popcorn was probably on the list.

Fortunately, unlike traditional popcorn, Dazzles gourmet oven baked corn has no kernels or hulls!