

## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Diverticular Disease

Diverticular disease is a common condition affecting the digestive system. It occurs when small pouches, called diverticula, are formed in the wall of your bowel. When these pouches become inflamed or infected, this condition is known as **diverticulitis**.

Diet plays an important role in causing diverticular disease. A low fibre diet can cause constipation and the pressure of passing hard stools through the large bowel can cause diverticula to form.

Diet also plays an important role in helping to keep any unpleasant symptoms of diverticular disease (such as diarrhoea and abdominal pain) to a minimum.

### High fibre diet

It is a good idea to follow a high fibre diet **during times of remission from symptoms** (e.g. when stools are formed and no abdominal pain occurs) as it helps to keep your stools soft, bulky and regular.

There are two types of fibre: insoluble and soluble.

**Insoluble** fibre is found in wholegrain cereals and foods containing them.

**Soluble** fibre is found naturally in oats, fruit and vegetables, peas, beans and pulses.

You should try to incorporate a variety of both types of fibre into your diet.

A healthy diet for diverticular disease consists of:

- A balanced diet, high in fibre.
- A good fluid intake (8-10 cups daily). A hot drink to start the day may help stimulate the bowel. In hot weather you will need to increase your fluid intake.
- Regular meals (helps prevent wind building up in the intestine).
- Chewing your food well.
- Eating with your mouth closed.
- Choosing foods that are neither too hot nor too cold.
- Where possible, try to make daily exercise part of your routine.

How to incorporate fibre into your daily meal pattern:

1. Eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day.
  - One serving = 2 tablespoons of stewed/tinned fruit, 2 tablespoons of vegetables, 1 medium piece of fruit (e.g. an apple, an orange), 2 small fruits (e.g. 2 plums, 2 apricots), 1 slice of large fruit (e.g. melon, pineapple), 7-14 very small fruit (e.g. strawberries, grapes)
2. Choose high fibre or wholemeal bread.
  - If you do not like these, try 50:50 or 'best of both'.
  - Avoid bread with seeds or grains.
3. Try wholegrain or fibre enriched cereals.
  - For example; Branflakes, Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, Porridge.
4. When baking, try to use wholemeal flour, to begin with use ½ wholemeal and ½ white flour.
  - You may need to add more fluid to the recipe due to increased fibre content.
5. If you eat rice or pasta try the brown varieties.
  - These may take longer to cook but have more flavour.
6. Choose biscuits or crackers which contain wholemeal flour.
  - For example digestive biscuits and wholewheat crackers or crispbreads.
7. Add pulses, beans and/or lentils to meals when cooking.
  - For example add chickpeas, lentils, beans, split peas or red kidney beans to casseroles

It is important to increase your intake of fibre slowly over a period of 2-3 weeks, both initially **and** during reintroduction. Soluble sources of fibre may be better tolerated at first.

After a flare up, you may notice increased wind or bloating at first, however this is normal and should soon settle.

Aim to have at least one high fibre food with each meal.

## **Other foods that may affect your symptoms**

Digestive tracts are as individual as their owners and therefore foods affect different people in varying ways.

In a few people some fibrous foods have been found to be an irritant and may aggravate diverticular disease. **You will only need to avoid foods from the list below if you find them to be a problem:**

Tomato pips	Beans
Strawberry/Raspberry pips	Sweetcorn
Nuts with husks	Onions
Seeds	Extra bran added to foods
Peas	

Following the above diet along with good fluid intake should not cause you a problem.

## Low fibre diet

Sometime you may have a flare-up of Diverticular Disease known as ***diverticulitis***. During a flare-up you will experience symptoms such as altered bowels habits (diarrhoea and/or constipation), abdominal pain/bloating and/or blood in stools.

If your symptoms include diarrhoea, you should commence a **low fibre diet** as outlined below until your stools have become formed again (usually not longer than 6-8 weeks at any one time).

Fibre is the part of food that passes through the body undigested. You will need to reduce the fibre content of your diet during a flare-up to aid relief of symptoms by reducing the frequency and quantity of stools, therefore giving the colon time to heal.

It is important not to remain on a low fibre diet for a prolonged period of time as it is limited in fruit and vegetable intake as well as wholegrains which are essential for good health. This diet is generally advised for 6-8 weeks or until resumption of normal bowel habit. This diet can cause constipation and restricts nutrients in the diet hence it is important that you do not follow this diet for more than 8 weeks. If your symptoms do not improve within 6-8 weeks please liaise with your Doctor or Dietitian for further guidance. If you are unsure of the length of time you are required to follow a low fibre diet then please consult with your Doctor.

## Other useful tips

Some food and drinks can increase the movement of food through your gut and cause diarrhoea. This effect can vary from person to person.

You may find that taking less of the food and drinks below will improve your symptoms:

- Caffeine drinks e.g. tea, coffee, cola drinks (try decaffeinated instead)

- Alcohol
- Fizzy drinks
- Sugar free products containing Sorbitol (e.g. drinks and sweets)
- Fruit juice (no more than one glass per day)
- Spicy foods
- Fried/very fatty foods

When your stools have become formed you are advised to go back on a normal healthy high fibre diet as outlined above, introducing fibre *gradually* back into your diet over approximately 2 weeks to help your bowels to adjust.

	Low fibre foods	High fibre foods
<b>Breakfast cereals</b>	Refined breakfast cereals e.g. Rice Krispies, Special K, Coco Pops, Sugar Puffs, Cornflakes	Wholegrain breakfast cereals e.g. Branflakes, Allbran, Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, Muesli, Shreddies, Porridge, Any cereals containing dried fruit or nuts
<b>Bread, flours, rice and pasta</b>	Bread rolls, pitta, chapattis & naan bread made with white flour Cornflour, custard powder, sago, tapioca & semolina White rice, cous cous, polenta, tortillas and tacos Pasta made with white flour	Brown, wholemeal or granary bread, rolls, pitta and chapattis Currant and fruit loaves Bread with added seeds, fruit or nuts Wholemeal/granary flour Brown/wild rice Pasta made with wholemeal or granary flour
<b>Biscuits, cakes, crackers, sweets and chocolate</b>	White flour biscuits and cakes e.g. Rich tea, morning coffee, shortbread, sponge cake, plain scones and crumpets Cream crackers and white crispbread Boiled sweets, pastilles, chocolate, toffee and fudge	Wholemeal biscuits e.g. digestives, flapjacks and oatcakes Wholemeal crackers and crispbread Rye bread Sweets, chocolate, biscuits, cakes and crackers containing fruit, nuts and seeds
<b>Meat and alternatives</b>	All tender meat, poultry, fish, eggs Quorn and tofu	Tough/gristly meat Fish bones Pulses e.g. lentils or chickpeas Nuts

<b>Fruit</b>	Fruit or vegetable juice (no pulp or bits) maximum of 1 small glass (120ml) per day Tinned, stewed or fresh fruit with <b>no skins or pips</b> e.g. apples, peaches, pears or ripe bananas: maximum of 1 small serving (4oz/100g) of per day	Fruit juice with pulp/bits All fruit with skins, seeds, pips and stalks e.g. raspberries, strawberries, oranges, pineapple & grapes Dried fruit Green bananas
<b>Vegetables</b>	Well cooked vegetables with no seeds e.g. carrots, swede or broccoli: maximum of 1 small serving (2oz/50g) per day Creamed / boiled / roasted / chipped potatoes (no skin) maximum of 1 small serving per day	Salad Raw vegetables Potatoes with skins Peas, sweetcorn and beans Baked beans Mushrooms
<b>Soups</b>	Clear, Consommé or strained soup Cream soups	Unstrained vegetable based soup e.g. leek and potato, vegetable or lentils
<b>Dairy and fats</b>	All milk, cream and cheese All butter, margarine, oils, mayonnaise and salad cream Smooth yoghurts (without fruit pieces), ice cream, milk puddings and mousses	Yoghurts or cheese with added fruit, nuts, seeds or cereals
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	Seedless, rindless or jelly varieties of jam & marmalade Smooth peanut butter Sugar, honey, syrup, chocolate spread Ketchup and bottled sauces Crisps Meat/yeast extracts e.g. Bovril or Marmite Vinegar	Jams & marmalade with seeds or rind Crunchy peanut butter Chutneys and pickles Twiglets and savoury snacks containing nuts/pulses e.g. bombay mix

<b>Drinks</b>	Hot chocolate, cocoa, tea, coffee Ovaltine or Horlicks Flavoured water & fruit squash Fruit juice (no pulp, see daily allowance) Fizzy drinks (you may wish to avoid or reduce these, as they can stimulate the gut) Milkshakes	Fruit and vegetable juices containing seeds or pips Fruit smoothies Yoghurt drinks with added fruit, nuts, seeds or cereal
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If you are experiencing a loss of appetite or weight loss as a result of diverticular disease, or are recovering from diverticulitis and are concerned, ask to see a Dietitian.

If you were given this leaflet by a hospital Dietitian, please contact West Suffolk Hospital Nutrition & Dietetic Department on 01284 713609 if you have any questions.

If you were given this leaflet by any other health professional (e.g. Consultant, Endoscopy department), please contact West Suffolk Community Nutrition & Dietetic Department on 01284 748850.

**If you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format, please call 01284 712555 Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).**

*If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the disabledgo website link below:*  
<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>

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