



Health Fact Sheet

Diverticulitis

Diverticulitis is a condition of the small and large bowel where abnormally formed pockets in the bowel wall become distended and can get infected and inflamed.

The condition is thought to be a result of eating a refined diet with insufficient fibre, and not taking enough exercise – primitive cultures which have fibre rich diets do not suffer from this condition.

They typically form in people who suffer frequently from constipation – the increased pressure on the bowel wall forms pouches at weak points in the colon wall. Once they have formed they do not go away. However, many people live with these diverticuli without any problems – it is only when they become inflamed they become a problem with symptoms ranging from abdominal discomfort through to fever, chills, nausea and pain. In very severe cases, a diverticuli can rupture, causing the intestinal contents to flow into the abdomen. This can be life-threatening due to sepsis.

Smoking and stress make the condition worse, as do gall bladder disease, poor eating habits, coronary artery disease and obesity.

Several approaches are required to treat this problem:

1. Reduce inflammation and/or infection
2. Cleanse and tone the bowel
3. Increase levels of soluble fibre

If the bowel is inflamed, it is important to eat a light diet – lightly steamed vegetables and sources of soluble fibre such as oats (preferably well soaked in water) – and drink diluted vegetable juices and/or apple or grape juice. Supplements to take to help reduce inflammation in the bowel are:

Turmeric – 10,000 mg capsule daily. High anti-inflammatory

Omega 3 EPA or Flaxseed Oil – help to calm down inflammation

Slippery Elm - a mucous forming herb which helps to soothe and reduce inflammation. Slippery Elm is also available from some health food stores as a herbal tea.

Aloe vera juice is very soothing to the intestines, helps heal the inflamed areas and can help improve assimilation of nutrients which is often compromised when the bowel is inflamed.

L-Glutamine – an enzyme which is a major metabolic fuel for the intestinal cells, and helps heal and maintain the villi, the absorption surfaces of the gut.

Garlic can help to improve infected areas of the gut – it is very anti-bacterial. Eat raw cloves if wished, but a supplement keeps your friends happy! Ensure it has active allicin, the effective ingredient – odour-free varieties don't!

Pau d'arco – again can be taken as a supplement or as a herbal tea. Very antibacterial, and has a cleansing and healing effect.

Once a flare-up is under control consider cleansing and toning the bowel. Red Raspberry can be very tonifying for the abdominal muscles, but nothing will beat proper exercise to get all the muscles which support the intestines properly toned – it will also help improve constipation.

Ensure you are drinking plenty of water as this is needed to move waste through the bowel quickly and keep the pouches clean of toxic wastes, and increase the levels of fibre in your diet - waste which is moved through the bowel quickly does not have a chance to become infected and cause inflammation.

Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Ideally you need about 30 gm of fibre daily, and as an average western diet only delivers around 12 – 15 gm you might like to consider adding in a fibre supplement to be taken daily. For good food sources of soluble fibre see fact sheet on Fibre. Insoluble fibres such as wheat bran can be too harsh for those suffering from diverticulitis.

During an acute attack, you may need to revert to a low fibre diet, but it is important to increase fibre levels once this is over. When an attack begins a cleansing enema using 2 – 4 pints of warm water and fresh lemon juice can help to rid the colon of undigested and 'stuck' food, and relieve pain and reduce the duration of an attack.

Activated charcoal tablets can help to reduce bloating and gas during and attack.

Also consider taking a probiotic supplement. Initially take for a couple of months to ensure a good level of gut bacteria, which can help reduce inflammation and improve gut function. Thereafter, take during and after an attack.

This is a problem that, once you have it, needs to be managed through proper dietary choices.