

DIVERTICULOSIS vs DIVERTICULITIS?

by LESTER STINE, MD

A diverticulum is a pouch-like protrusion of the bowel wall. While this can occur at any point along the GI tract, it is most often found in the colon and is then called diverticulosis. This is a common problem and tends to be found more often as we get older. About 20% of people age 40 have this condition. This increases to 60% by age 60.

While diverticulosis can occur throughout the colon, it is most common on the left side. The formation of these pockets is related to weaknesses in the wall of the colon where small blood vessels penetrate the muscle layer to provide nutrients and oxygen to the lining of the colon. Increased pressure in the colon, perhaps caused by a lack of fiber in Western diets, then causes the colon wall to pouch outward in these areas.

One of the complications of diverticulosis is diverticulitis. (*The suffix “-itis” is often used in medicine to refer to inflammation or infection - as in appendicitis, bronchitis, etc.*) **Diverticulitis occurs when these pockets**

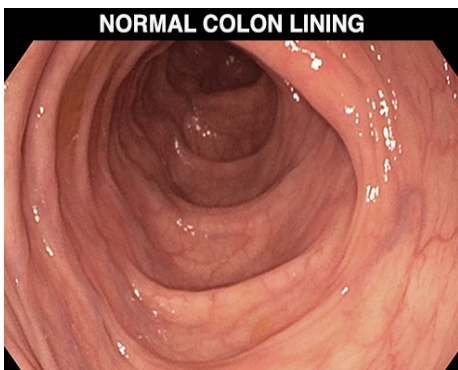


become infected. There are several risk factors, which may increase a person's chance of developing diverticulitis. Studies have shown that diets high in red meat and fat and low in dietary fiber increase the risk. The risk of diverticulitis is also increased with lack of



Dr. Lester Stine

Dr. Lester E. Stine was born in the Pittsburgh area. He received his undergraduate Biology degree and Medical Degree (1986) from the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Dr. Stine then completed an Internal Medicine Internship and Residency at the University Hospitals of Cleveland. He received the Charles Carpenter Award for Clinical Excellence as a Senior Resident. Dr. Stine's interest in liver disease took him to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center where he did his Fellowship in Gastroenterology and Hepatology. Dr. Stine is Board-Certified in both Internal Medicine and Gastroenterology. He scored in the top 10% of candidates taking the gastroenterology boards nationwide. He is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society. Dr. Stine is now President of the Center for Digestive Health and Nutrition and Medical Director of Three Rivers Endoscopy Center.



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vigorous physical activity, smoking, and obesity (a BMI>25). It is important to note that eating seeds, nuts, and popcorn is NOT associated with the development of diverticulitis.

Diverticulosis does not usually cause symptoms. In fact, most people learn they have the pouches during a routine colonoscopy. Diverticulitis, however, tends to cause significant symptoms including abdominal pain (typically in the lower abdomen and more often on the left side than the right side), fever and chills, and change in bowel habits, often tending toward constipation. Bleeding is not a common symptom of diverticulitis.

Treatment of diverticulitis usually requires antibiotics. In mild cases, these can be given orally as an outpatient. In more severe cases, the patient has to be admitted to the hospital for a few days of IV antibiotics and bowel rest, followed by outpatient oral antibiotics.

More severe diverticulitis can be complicated by abscess formation, which may need to be drained by placing a catheter into the abscess cavity under x-ray guidance. Rarely surgery for acute diverticulitis must be undertaken to get rid of the infection. Fortunately, with the use of more powerful antibiotics, this is not a common occurrence.

Sometimes patients who develop multiple bouts of recurrent diverticulitis may need to have elective surgery to have part of the left colon removed and reconnected (typically without the need for a bag) to prevent further bouts and complications.

In a patient with an initial bout of diverticulitis, colonoscopy should be considered once the infection resolves. We also recommend a high fiber diet for our patients with diverticulosis (and in fact, for most our patients).

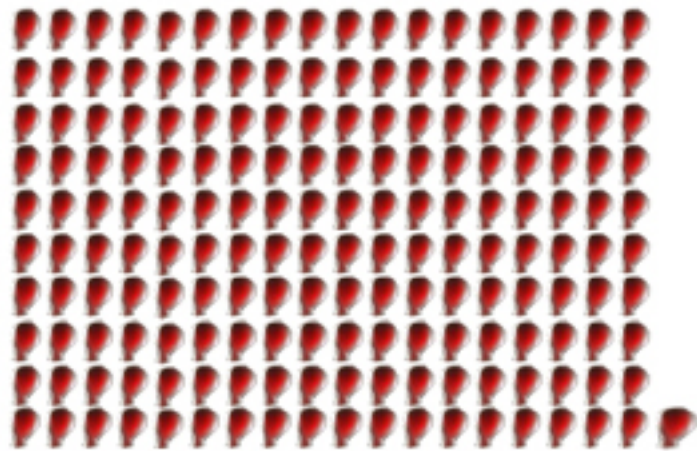
In addition, a mixture of Miralax and two over-the-counter fiber supplements may be helpful. It has helped many of our patients. You can find the printed recipe for this “fibermix” on our office website at www.gihealth.com in the Patient Education menu listed titled [Dr. Fusco’s High Fiber Diet](#). If you have any questions or other digestive problems, please feel free to call to and make an appointment with one of our providers at (412) 262-1000.

The CENTER FOR DIGESTIVE HEALTH & NUTRITION is a private practice of experienced gastroenterologists and staff dedicated to the prevention and treatment of digestive disorders. Our physicians have been serving the needs of those in Western Pennsylvania and surrounding areas since 1977 having cared for tens of thousands of individuals with digestive problems. First opened in 1996, THREE RIVERS ENDOSCOPY CENTER is affiliated with our clinical practice and conveniently located in the same building.

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