



## **Diverticular disease**

### **What is diverticular disease?**

A diverticulum is a sac-like protrusion or pocket that sometimes forms in the muscular wall of the colon, particularly at points where blood vessels enter. Diverticular disease refers to:

- Diverticulosis means that diverticula are present within the colon.
- Diverticulitis refers to inflammation of diverticula.
- Diverticular bleeding refers to bleeding from an artery located within a diverticulum.

### **What causes diverticular disease?**

Diverticular disease is a common problem that affects men and women equally. The risk of disease increases with age. It is seen more commonly in developed countries, in which the incidence has increased over time. This suggests that environmental and lifestyle factors may have a role in the development of this disease. One factor may be low intake of dietary fibre. High fibre diets increase stool bulk thereby decreasing the wall tension in the colon. High wall tension is thought to increase the risk of developing diverticula.

### **What are the symptoms of diverticular disease?**

Diverticulosis is often an incidental finding at the time of a test done for other reasons, such as a colonoscopy, or barium enema. Most people with diverticulosis have no symptoms and will remain symptom free for the rest of their lives. About 20% percent of people will develop diverticulitis while 10% will develop diverticular bleeding.

**Diverticulitis** — The most common symptom is pain in the left lower abdomen. Uncommon complications associated with diverticulitis include the following:

- Abscess — a localised collection of pus
- Fistula — an abnormal track between two organs that are not normally in communication
- Obstruction / Stricture — a blockage of the colon
- Peritonitis — infection involving the intra-abdominal space

**Diverticular bleeding** — Diverticular bleeding is most often painless bleeding through the rectum. Abdominal discomfort is usually not present, and it is rare for bleeding to coexist with acute diverticulitis.

**How is diverticular disease diagnosed?** The following are the ways to diagnose diverticulosis:

- Barium enema / Colonoscopy / CT scan:

### **What are the treatment options for diverticular disease?**

Patients with diverticular disease who do not have any symptoms do not require specific treatment. However, most doctors recommend fibre supplementation, which can help to bulk the stools and thereby possibly help prevent the development of new diverticula, diverticulitis, or diverticular bleeding, although this has not been proven. Some doctors advocate a diet low in pips, large seeds, nuts, and corn cobs, but again this is unproven

### **Diverticulitis**

- Mild symptoms can be treated as outpatients with a clear liquid diet and with oral antibiotics.
- Moderate to severe symptoms may require hospitalisation during which they are kept fasting while being given intravenous fluids and antibiotics. Patients who develop an abscess or obstruction may require drainage of the abscess or surgery.

**Diverticular bleeding** — Most cases of diverticular bleeding resolve on their own. However, some patients require interventions, which may include a colonoscopy, or surgery.

### **What is the prognosis for diverticular disease?**

After successful therapy for a first attack of diverticulitis:

- ◆ 1/3 of patients will remain asymptomatic,
- ◆ 1/3 will have episodic cramps without diverticulitis,
- ◆ 1/3 will go on to have a 2<sup>nd</sup> attack of diverticulitis.

Surgery may be recommended for patients with repeated attacks of diverticulitis or diverticular bleeding.