

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ACUTE DIVERTICULITIS

In the Clinic  
Annals of Internal Medicine

## What Is Diverticulitis?

Diverticulitis is common, especially in adults older than 50 years. Small pouches can form in the colon (the lower part of your intestinal tract), and if they become inflamed or infected, it's called diverticulitis.

## What Are the Symptoms?

Patients with diverticulitis have symptoms that can range from mild to severe and may include:

- Stomach pain, especially in the lower left part of your belly
- Nausea
- Fever
- A change in your bowel habits, like sudden diarrhea or constipation

## Who Is at Risk?

Diverticulitis affects older adults, usually those over 50. Other risk factors include:

- Obesity
- Smoking
- A low-fiber diet
- Eating red meat
- Not getting enough exercise
- Heavy alcohol use
- Taking certain medicines, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), corticosteroids, and opiates
- Low vitamin D levels
- A family history

## How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and perform a physical examination. This will include touching and pressing on your stomach and abdomen.
- Some women might need a pelvic examination to check for other reasons for pain.
- You may need to give a blood or urine sample to check for other causes of your symptoms.
- You may also have an imaging test, like an ultrasound or a CT scan, to learn more about your condition.

## How Is It Treated?

- Most people are treated with antibiotics. However, if your condition is mild, you might not need them.
- You should drink only clear liquids and take acetaminophen (Tylenol) for pain. It's best not to take NSAIDs (such as ibuprofen [Advil])



because they can hurt your stomach and colon.

- When your symptoms start to get better, you can eat a low-fiber diet until you feel completely better. This includes canned or cooked fruits without skin, green beans, carrots, potatoes, eggs, fish, poultry, white bread, dairy products, and low-fiber cereals.
- If you have severe diverticulitis or diverticulitis that keeps coming back, you might need to be hospitalized or have surgery.
- After your diverticulitis goes away, your doctor might suggest a colonoscopy to monitor the health of your colon.

## How Can I Prevent Diverticulitis?

- Eat a healthy, balanced, high-fiber diet. This includes lots of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables. Limit your intake of red meat.
- Don't take NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen.
- Don't smoke.
- Maintain a healthy body weight, or lose weight if you are overweight.

## Questions for My Doctor

- How long will it take for my diverticulitis to go away?
- What caused my diverticulitis?
- Should I eat a special diet after my diverticulitis goes away?
- Do I need follow-up treatment?
- What medicines should I avoid while being treated for diverticulitis?
- What happens if my diverticulitis comes back?
- When will I start to feel better?

## For More Information



### MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/diverticulosisanddiverticulitis.html>

### American College of Gastroenterology

<http://patients.gi.org/topics/diverticulosis-and-diverticulitis>