Managing Diverticulitis

Diverticulitis occurs when small, bulging pouches develop in your digestive tract and become inflamed or infected. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

**Vocabulary to Know**

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here’s what they mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Colon</td>
<td>The part of the large intestine that extends from the cecum to the rectum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intestines</td>
<td>A long tube extending from the stomach to the colon in which food is digested, absorbed, and excreted.</td>
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<td>Large Intestine</td>
<td>The lower part of the intestine in which water is removed from digested foods before it is passed out of the body as solid waste.</td>
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<td>Small Intestine</td>
<td>The upper part of the intestine between the stomach and the large intestine.</td>
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<td>Inflammation</td>
<td>Occurs when the body is trying to fight something that is not normal. In the case of diverticulitis, pockets in the intestine (usually the colon) can balloon outwards and become inflamed and result in a variety of symptoms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colitis</td>
<td>Inflammation of the lining of the colon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diverticula</td>
<td>Small pouches that develop in the colon. These pouches are common after age 40 and seldom cause problems. When they become inflamed or infected, a person is said to have diverticulitis.</td>
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<td>Flare</td>
<td>People who have diverticulosis may develop a flare which results in diverticulitis.</td>
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<td>Colonoscopy</td>
<td>A test that examines the intestines using flexible lighted tube. This test can be used to diagnose diverticulitis.</td>
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<td>Fiber</td>
<td>The indigestible part of carbohydrate found in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Fiber helps to increase transit time in the bowels and has been shown to aid in colon health. When a person is experiencing diverticulitis they must eat a lower fiber diet, but if there is no inflammation or infection, a higher fiber diet is recommended for bowel health and regularity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low Residue Diet</td>
<td>Otherwise known as a low-fiber nutrition therapy, reduces the frequency and volume of stool. This lessens irritation to the gastrointestinal tract, which can help it heal.</td>
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Questions to Ask
These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your diverticulitis.

About Symptoms
- My stomach hurts all the time and my bowel movements are off, is this a sign of diverticulitis?
- How do I know if my symptoms are severe? What if I get a fever?

About Causes & Risk Factors
- What are the most likely causes of this disease?
- Did I develop this because I am overweight?
- I suffer from constipation, is this a risk factor?
- Did I get this because I don't eat properly?
- Are there any types of medicines that can cause diverticulosis to become diverticulitis?
- If I reduce my stress levels, will that lower my risk of it coming back?
- Does exercise help to reduce flare ups? What about smoking?
- I don't like to eat vegetables and my diet is high in meat, is that a problem?
- If I have these attacks often, does it increase my risk of developing colon cancer?

About Diagnosis
- What kinds of test will I have to take in order to confirm my diagnosis?
- Do I have to have a CT scan?
- Is there a specific test that can show the severity of the disease?
- Do I need to have a colonoscopy?

About Treatment
- Should I be taking any dietary supplements? I heard probiotics may help to prevent diverticulitis?
- What foods can I eat and what should I avoid?
About Treatment (continued)

- Can I eat vegetables? What kinds and should they be cooked?
- Do I need to take medication?
- One of my friends had to have surgery due to diverticulitis, will that happen to me?

About Coping

- What is the best method of managing this disease along with other health conditions?
- Is there someone I can meet with for more education, such as a registered dietitian?
- Are there any good resources that you recommend for healthy eating? Or support groups?

About Living With Diverticulitis

- Are there certain foods I should avoid?
- Should I be following a specific meal plan?
- What about exercise? Will that help to prevent attacks?
- What types of foods are high in fiber?
- What is an example of a low fiber diet?