

Diet for Diverticular Disease

What is diverticular disease?

Diverticular disease is a fairly common condition that develops in the intestine. With diverticular disease (diverticulosis), small places in the intestinal wall become weak and bulge outward a little, forming pockets where digested food may be trapped. When that happens, the pockets become irritated and inflamed (diverticulitis). The inflammation can cause pain or even infection.

What can you do about it?

You can help prevent the worst effects of diverticulitis by avoiding foods you know can give you problems. Increasing the amount of fiber in your diet helps by keeping the digested food moving through your system. Fiber also helps keep the muscles of the digestive tract healthy so they are less likely to weaken and bulge out. The key is to add fiber to your diet gradually until you reach the recommended daily total. Most people eat foods with a total of about 10 grams of fiber but 14 grams for every 1,000 calories you eat is needed for a healthy diet. You can also keep track of the amount of fiber in your diet by reading the “Nutrition Facts” printed on food packages.

If a high-fiber food seems to cause pain or discomfort, eat less of it or stop eating it for a while. Then try adding it to your diet again in small amounts.

How to increase fiber in your diet.

Here are some suggestions to increase the amount of fiber in your meals:

- Eat 3 to 5 servings of vegetables, 1 to 7 servings of fruit, 6 to 11 servings of whole grain breads, cereals, whole wheat pasta, or brown rice each day.
- Eat more kidney beans, navy beans, lima beans, and black-eyed peas.
- Eat cereals that are high in fiber, such as All Bran or Fiber One.
- Eat the peel of raw fruits and vegetables.
- Eat a baked potato, including the skin, instead of mashed potatoes or french fries.
- Eat fresh fruit instead of just drinking fruit juice.
- Sprinkle wheat germ on cereal, low-fat yogurt, or ice cream.
- Add whole wheat bread, oatmeal, or wheat germ to meat loaf or hamburger casseroles.

Be sure to drink extra water – at least 8 cups a day. Fiber absorbs water, and the water will help move food along.

When you have pain from diverticulitis:

Choose foods that are soft or bland.

Here are some foods that should bring relief.

Applesauce	Rice
Grits	Saltine crackers
Plain noodles	Milk
White bread or rolls	Apple juice
Baked chicken, beef or fish	Jello
Soup	Cheese
Bananas	Cooked vegetables

As you feel better, start adding more fiber to your diet.

Caution!

Some types of fiber might be too rough. It takes trial and error to learn what foods cause you pain and discomfort. Some people cannot eat fried foods, raw fruit, vegetable seeds, or nuts. Some people with diverticulitis may also have problems when they eat hot, spicy foods.

To learn what your body will tolerate, keep a diary of what you eat so you can find out what causes pain. Bring your diary to your next appointment with your doctor or dietitian.

If you cut out whole groups of foods, it may be important to take a multiple vitamin-mineral supplement. Ask your doctor or dietitian.