



Diverticular disease

Typically, the wall of the large intestine, also called the colon, is smooth. An irregular, bulging pouch in the colon wall is called a diverticulum. Multiple pouches are called diverticula.

Diverticula in the large intestine is a common condition.

The frequency increases with age, and half of all 70-year-olds have diverticula in the large intestine. Most often, they don't cause problems. The presence of diverticula is called diverticulosis. Diverticulosis isn't a disease condition.

The cause of the development of diverticula in the large intestine is unknown but is believed to be associated with an increased tendency for constipation with age. This may be due to a reduced fibre content in the diet, lower fluid intake, and decreased physical activity. It is assumed, though not proven, that constipation leads to increased pressure in the large intestine, resulting in the formation of diverticula.

Symptoms

Many people experience lower abdominal pain and feeling bloated as well as a tendency towards constipation, sometimes alternating bowel movements that switch between loose and hard stools.

Examinations

Diverticula are usually detected through an endoscopic examination of the entire colon (colonoscopy) or the lower part of the colon. In some cases, where the examination cannot be completed, a CT scan of the colon is performed.

The main purpose of these examinations is to exclude other conditions.

Medical Treatment

If diverticula are detected without causing bothersome symptoms, no treatment is required. If constipation or alternating bowel movements are present, we recommend plenty of fluids, daily exercise, and, if needed, 1-2g of Magnesia or HUSK (Visiblin). This may reduce the risk of future complications. We also recommend a diet rich in fibre.

Complications from Diverticula in the Colon

Bleeding

Diverticula in the colon can sometimes cause sudden fresh bleeding from the rectum. This bleeding usually stops on its own and is not life-threatening. In rare cases (less than 5%), recurrent bleeding may occur, requiring a blood transfusion, and surgery may be necessary.

Inflammation

Diverticula in the colon can sometimes lead to an inflammatory reaction, possibly because stool becomes trapped in the diverticula.

Symptoms of inflammation include pain that develops over several hours to a few days, often in the lower left side of the abdomen, as diverticula are most commonly found in this part of the colon. You may experience fever, nausea, vomiting, constipation, and diarrhoea.

If inflammation occurs, you should consult a doctor, as worsening of the condition may require surgery. Most cases resolve on their own, potentially with the addition of antibiotic treatment if the fever is high. Often, a CT scan of the abdomen is performed.

If no further complications are found during the examinations, you should complete the course of antibiotics.

What Can You Do Yourself?

If you are prone to constipation or alternating bowel movements, we recommend the following:

- Drink 1½–2 litres of fluids daily
- Take 1–2g of Magnesia daily or as needed
- Eat a fibre-rich diet
- Engage in regular physical activity

This may help reduce the risk of future complications related to diverticula in the colon.

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