

# **DIVERTICULAR DISEASE**

**PATIENT INFORMATION BOOKLET**

Written by  
**L.T. Bolster**

## What is Diverticular Disease?

Diverticular disease is a condition which affects the large bowel or colon. A diverticulum is a small out-pouching of the lining of the bowel which is pushing through the muscle layer of the bowel, a bit like a hernia.



Many people who have diverticular disease are totally unaware of the fact as it causes them no problems.

## What causes Diverticular Disease?

Diverticular disease is thought to be caused by the refined low fibre food that we eat. It is much less common in Africa, probably because of difference in diet.

## How common is Diverticular Disease?

It is very common in Western countries especially with advancing age. It is unusual for someone under the age of 40 to have it, but at least 60% of people over the age of 65 will have diverticular disease.

## And What is Diverticulitis

Diverticulitis is the medical word used to describe the condition when these out-pouchings become inflamed.



## What are the symptoms?

Diverticular disease can cause any or all of the following:-

- Crampy abdominal pain
- Bloating
- Constipation
- Diarrhoea
- Mucus

These symptoms may come and go from time to time and you may only experience some not all, of these symptoms.

It is important to consult your doctor for diagnosis and advice on treatment. The doctor will need to examine your back passage, he/she will do this with their finger. This should not be painful, many people find it more embarrassing than uncomfortable.

## Are any investigations necessary?

Investigations are usually arranged to exclude any other bowel disorders that produce the same symptoms as diverticular disease. Your doctor will want to be

entirely sure that they have excluded cancer as a cause by arranging an X-ray of the bowel (Barium Enema) or possibly a telescopic inspection of the bowel (Colonoscopy).

## What treatment is available?

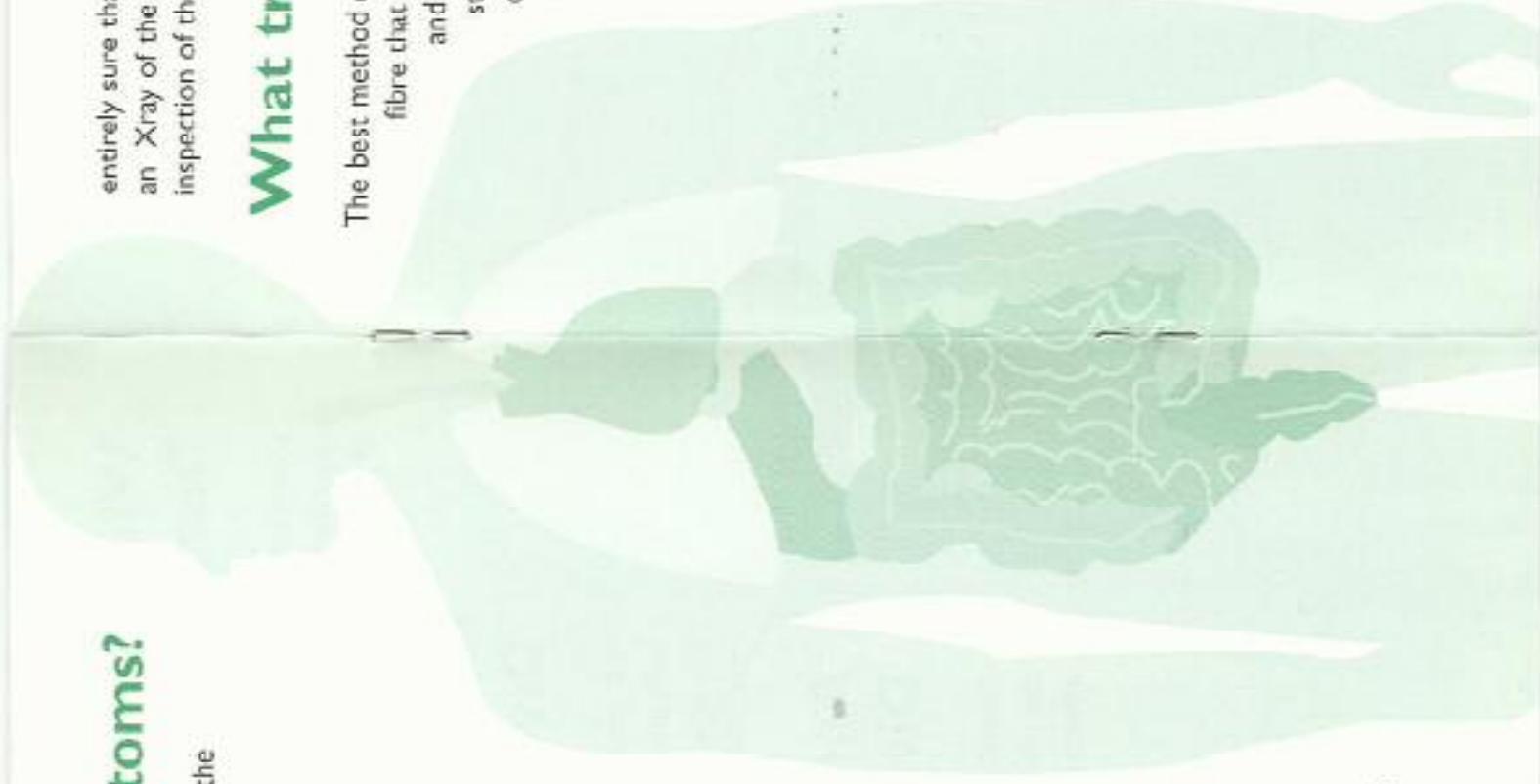
The best method of managing diverticular disease is to increase the fibre that you eat instead of refined foods such as white bread and desserts. This ensures the passage of large soft stools which cannot become trapped in the diverticulum. A large soft stool is easier for the muscles in the bowel to move along. Your doctor may prescribe a bulking agent such as Fybogel which contains bran fibre and helps to produce one soft formed stool per day.

## What is Fibre?

Fibre is the part of food which your body cannot digest. A regular intake of fibre is important for healthy bowels. Fibre is found in foods such as wholegrain cereals, wholemeal bread, fruit, vegetables, salad, pulses, beans and peas.

As well as regular amounts of fibre in your food, you need to drink plenty of fluid, especially water 8-10 cups daily, to swell and to soften the fibre.

It is important to introduce fibre containing foods slowly as they may cause flatulence and abdominal discomfort initially. Take at least a month to get used to these new foods.



## Foods that are high in Fibre

- Wholegrain based cereals, such as all-bran, bran flakes, weetabix.
- Wholemeal bread
- Vegetables, salad and fruit.
- Brown rice and pasta.
- Peas, beans and pulses such as lentils, chick peas and kidney beans.

## What can you do to help yourself?

The most important factors in controlling your symptoms are increasing the amount of fibre you eat and increasing the amount of water that you drink.

The key to increasing the amount of fibre you eat is to ensure that a variety of high fibre foods are included in your daily diet. A balanced approach is essential. You should not attempt to increase fibre simply by sprinkling bran over everything. Eating more fibre should not involve a drastic change to your normal eating pattern. You may find it easier to increase your fibre intake if you gradually introduce foods from the above list which are rich in fibre.

## What complications may occur?

Inflammation of the diverticulum can sometimes occur and may cause one or more of the following symptoms:-

Pain, fever, chills and change in bowel habits. More intense symptoms are associated with serious complications such as perforation, abscess or fistula formation.

Severe cases require hospitalization and surgical operations are occasionally necessary to remove the affected segment of the bowel.

## Remember

If you experience any of the symptoms listed below, it does not necessarily mean that you have colorectal cancer or any other serious health problem. However, you should not delay in seeking your doctors advice.

- Blood in the stool.
- Diarrhoea or constipation that continues after two weeks.
- Stools that are smaller in width than usual.
- Chronic fatigue.
- Stomach discomfort (bloating, fullness, cramping, frequent gas pains).
- Unexplainable weight loss.

