



University Hospitals Birmingham
NHS Foundation Trust



Diet and Diverticular Disease

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A change in diet can help to provide symptomatic relief from diverticular disease. This leaflet will explain the best dietary changes to make when you have symptoms, and what to eat to manage your condition long-term.

What is diverticular disease?

Diverticular disease is a medical condition where small bulges or pockets are found in the colon (large bowel), known as diverticula. Diverticula are common and can develop with age and from chronic constipation. You may not notice any symptoms from your diverticular disease, unless the diverticula have become infected or inflamed.

What is diverticulitis?

If you go on to develop diverticulitis, one or more of the pockets in your colon has become inflamed or infected. You may feel especially tired and unwell, as your body fights off the infection. Other symptoms can include severe pain, high temperatures, a change in bowel habit and rectal bleeding.

What should I eat during a flare of diverticulitis?

A low fibre diet should be followed until the diverticulitis has settled. After this, fibre should be gradually increased to a level that is comfortable for you.

What is a low fibre diet?

Dietary fibre is the tough part of food found typically in whole foods, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, wholegrains (such as brown rice, barley, oats) and nuts, beans and pulses. A low fibre diet reduces the amount of stool passing through the bowel, to help to improve bloating, abdominal discomfort and diarrhoea.

A low fibre diet is usually a temporary measure for symptom control, and it is unlikely that you will need to follow a low fibre diet long-term for your diverticular disease.

Here are a few tips to reduce your fibre intake short-term:

- Peel the skin off your potatoes and vegetables, but eat the soft inside part
- Remove stalks from broccoli and cauliflower, but you can eat the florets
- Remove any pips, seeds or stringy parts from the fruit

- Avoid raw salads and vegetables
- Choose easy to mash vegetables, such as carrots, parsnips and swede
- Choose a nut butter, such as peanut butter or almond butter, and avoid whole nuts
- Blend your vegetables to make a soup
- Have 150ml of smoothie or fruit juice with one meal a day (if you have high blood sugars you may want to avoid this)
- Use split lentils to make dahl
- Cook vegetables well or stew fruit to break down the fibre
- Avoid tough, fibrous or gristly meat, such as steak. Chicken, turkey, boneless fish, stewed meat or mince would be good alternatives
- Chew food well and take your time eating

For additional advice on following a low fibre diet, please ask your dietitian for our low fibre diet sheet

What should I eat once my diverticulitis has settled?

You should gradually re-introduce fibre back into your diet, as soon as your symptoms have settled down. Dietary fibre is essential for healthy gut flora, your immune system, good cholesterol levels and to reduce your chances of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes or having a stroke.

Should I avoid any foods long-term to prevent my diverticulitis from re-occurring?

There is no evidence to suggest that avoiding specific foods will help to prevent a flare up of diverticulitis. Historically, people were advised to avoid certain hard-to-digest foods, such as seeded fruits, nuts and seeds. More recent research suggests that these foods should be included to help to prevent constipation and for a healthy gut.

Reintroducing fibre into your Diet

We recommend that you start with one new fibrous food at a time, in order to monitor your tolerance and symptoms. Start with a small amount of fruit, then a vegetable or cereal, and gradually re-add fibre to a level that is comfortable for you. Over time, you may notice that your tolerance to fibre improves and your gastrointestinal symptoms settle as your body adjusts. Remember to chew food well and to ensure that you are drinking plenty of water when reintroducing fibre back into your diet.

What happens if I can no longer tolerate fibre?

After a period of time on a low fibre diet, the gut flora can change and the diversity of bacteria in your gut can reduce. This means that when you start to re-introduce fibre, your gut bacteria reacts to this and can produce more water and gas than usual. Over time your bowels should adjust to the additional fibre and any unpleasant wind or bloating should reduce.

Certain foods are known as “wind producing foods”, such as cabbage, brussel sprouts, beans, leek, onion and garlic. We would advise re-introducing these foods last if you struggle with excessive wind and bloating.

You may find that a probiotic can help to restore your gut bacteria. There are many types of probiotics available online, in the supermarket or from your local health store. Depending on your bowel activity, different strains of bacteria are proven to help your bowel health. For instance, if you suffer with constipation, you may find that a probiotic containing *Bifidobacterium lactis* improves your gut bacteria.

If you have any further concerns about your diet, bowel habits, or if you notice ongoing weight loss, please request a dietitian appointment to discuss your concerns further.

Contact details

Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Telephone: **0121 371 3485**

Heartlands Hospital, Good hope Hospital or Solihull Hospital

Telephone: **0121 424 2673**

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email **interpreting.service@uhb.nhs.uk**.

Gastroenterology Dietitians

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