

# Diet and diverticular disease

**i** Information for patients  
Sheffield Dietetics



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SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST





# Introduction

Diverticular disease and diverticulitis are related digestive conditions that affect the large bowel.

Diverticula are small bulges or pockets that can develop in the lining of the intestine as you get older. Most people with diverticula do not get any symptoms and only know they have them after having a scan for another reason.

When there are no symptoms, it is called **diverticulosis**.

When diverticula cause symptoms, such as pain in the lower stomach or bloating, it's called **diverticular disease**.

If the diverticula become inflamed or infected, causing more severe symptoms, it's called **diverticulitis**.

You're more likely to get diverticular disease and diverticulitis if you do not get enough fibre in your diet.

## What causes diverticular disease?

It's not known exactly why some people get diverticular disease, but it seems to be linked to age, diet and lifestyle, and genetics.

- **Age** - As you get older, the walls of your large intestine become weaker and the pressure of hard stools passing through your intestines can cause diverticula to form. The majority of people will have some diverticula by the time they are 80 years old.
- **Diet** - Not eating enough fibre is thought to be linked to developing diverticular disease and diverticulitis. Fibre helps to make your stools softer and larger so they put less pressure on the walls of your intestines.
- **Lifestyle** - Smoking, being overweight or obese, having a history of constipation.

- **Medications** - Long-term regular use of painkillers such as ibuprofen or aspirin can increase your risk of developing diverticular disease.
- **Genetics** - You're more likely to develop diverticula if you have a close relative with diverticular disease, especially if they developed it before they were 50.

## **What are the symptoms of diverticular disease?**

Symptoms of diverticular disease include:

- stomach pain, usually in your lower left side, that tends to come and go and gets worse during or shortly after eating. Emptying your bowels or passing wind can ease it
- constipation, diarrhoea, or both
- occasionally, blood in your stools

If your diverticula become infected and inflamed (diverticulitis), you may suddenly:

- get constant, more severe stomach pain
- have a high temperature
- have diarrhoea or constipation
- get mucus or blood in your poo or bleeding from your bottom (rectal bleeding)

**Seek immediate medical advice if you have any bleeding or severe pain**

# Dietary advice for diverticular disease

Once diverticula are formed they are permanent. Eating a high fibre diet may prevent further diverticula forming, ease the symptoms of diverticular disease and reduce possible complications such as diverticulitis.

Most adults should **aim to eat 30g of fibre a day**.

## What is fibre?

Fibre is the roughage contained within fruit, vegetables and grains that cannot be digested or absorbed within the bowel and instead passes through the gut. Fibre helps to make stools softer and easier to pass.

## High fibre foods include:

- High fibre breakfast cereals such as branflakes, porridge, weetabix or shredded wheat
- Wholemeal bread, whole wheat pasta and brown rice
- Beans, lentils and pulses
- Fruits and vegetables (fresh, tinned, frozen or dried)

Aim to eat a balanced diet, including five portions of fruit and vegetables per day.

## What is a portion of fruit and vegetables?

One adult portion of fruit and vegetables is 80g, which is approximately:

- Two small sized fruits such as two kiwis, satsumas or plums
- One handful of berries
- One medium sized fruit such as one apple, banana, pear, tomato or orange
- Half a large fruit such as a grapefruit or one 5cm slice of melon
- 150ml of fruit or vegetable juice or smoothie

- 30g (one heaped tablespoon) of dried fruit such as raisins, currants or sultanas
- Three heaped tablespoons of cooked vegetables or beans or pulses

Even if you have more, you can only count one portion of beans or pulses and one portion of fruit juice or vegetable juice or smoothie towards your 5 a day.

## How much fibre is in these high fibre foods?

<b>Food Portion</b>	<b>Fibre content</b>
Bran flakes (30g)	5.1g
Porridge (50g)	4.2g
Weetabix (x 2)	3.8g
Shredded wheat (x 2)	6g
Wholemeal bread (x 2 slices)	5.4g
Whole wheat pasta (170g cooked)	6.5g
Brown rice (185g cooked)	8.7g
Half a can of baked beans	7.7g
Lentils (100g cooked/drained)	7.8g
Portion of dried fruit (raisins) (30g)	1.2g
Baked potato with skin	5g
Pear (1 x medium)	4g
Apple (1 x medium)	2g
Carrots (80g)	2g
Orange (1 x medium)	1.7g
Peas (80g boiled)	4.4g

## **What if I am currently eating a low fibre diet?**

Gradually increase your fibre intake as well as your fluid intake as adding too much fibre at one time can cause bloating and cramps. The fluid helps your body to use the fibre from your diet by making your stools softer and easier to pass. Aim for six to eight glasses (1.5 – 2 litres) of fluid each day.

If you find increasing the fibre in your diet difficult or have other dietary restrictions that prevent you from including high fibre foods, you can ask your GP to prescribe dried fibre powders or medications such as Isphagula husk, Methylcellulose or liquid fibre supplement Hyfiber.

Some medications called antispasmodics and peppermint oil may help to reduce bloating and cramps.

## **Are there any foods I should avoid?**

There is no need to avoid any specific foods. It is important to understand that some people may react differently to fibre in their diet and there has to be an element of trial and error.

## What is diverticulitis?

Diverticulitis is caused when the balloon-like sacs become infected and inflamed. It may cause sudden, more constant and severe lower abdominal pain, a high temperature, nausea, changes in bowel habit, mucus or blood in stool or rectal bleeding. If you notice any of these symptoms you must seek medical help.

## How is diverticulitis treated?

Your doctor may advise a very low fibre diet or bowel rest (which may be a liquid nutrition diet for a few days, sometimes through a tube), depending on how bad your symptoms are. This is to reduce the size of stools passing through the bowel when it is painful and inflamed, and give your digestive system chance to rest. You may also be given antibiotics to help fight any infection and painkillers if needed.

If you are advised to follow a low fibre diet and are in hospital with diverticulitis you will need to choose from the low fibre menu. If you are at home there are some suggestions on the next page as to how to follow a low fibre diet.

If you have any questions about which foods may or may not be suitable please ask to speak to a dietitian.

**Once pain and inflammation has reduced you should aim to gradually reintroduce fibre as part of a balanced diet to help prevent further episodes of diverticulitis. Please check with your doctor or dietitian if you are unsure when to start reintroducing fibre.**



## Examples of a low fibre diet

### What foods are suitable for a low fibre diet?

	<b>Suitable foods</b>	<b>Foods to avoid</b>
<b>Meat and fish</b>	All kinds of meat and fish	Skin and bones of fish, gristle, tough cuts of meat, stews, casseroles and pies containing the vegetables listed below
<b>Alternative protein sources</b>	Eggs, soya mince, tofu	All pulses such as chick peas, kidney beans, lentils or baked beans
<b>Dairy foods</b>	Milk, cheese, butter or margarine, plain or smooth yoghurts	Yoghurts or cheese containing fruit or pieces of nut
<b>Breads and cereals</b>	Cornflakes, rice krispies, white bread, white rice, white pasta, cream crackers, rice cakes, any food made from white flour such as pastry or Yorkshire pudding	Wholewheat breakfast cereals, for example Weetabix, Branflakes or Shredded Wheat, all cereals containing fruit or nuts, oats, porridge, wholemeal or wholegrain breads and foods made from wholemeal flour, wholemeal pasta, brown rice, bran and pearl barley

	<b>Suitable foods</b>	<b>Foods to avoid</b>
<b>Potatoes</b>	Boiled or roast potatoes without skins, mashed potatoes, the inside of baked potatoes	Potato skins
<b>Vegetables</b>	Small amounts of well cooked root vegetables	Tough stalks, onion, peas, sweetcorn, raw salad vegetables
<b>Fruit</b>	Tinned or stewed fruit, banana (maximum 1 small banana per day)	Tough skins, citrus fruit, dried fruit including prunes, seeds and pips
<b>Nuts</b>	None allowed	All nuts and food containing nuts, including coconut and marzipan
<b>Cakes and biscuits</b>	Sponge cakes made with white flour (no nuts or dried fruits), for example Swiss rolls with seedless jam; plain biscuits, for example rich tea, shortbread, custard creams, ginger nut, chocolate fingers, Jaffa cakes	Flapjacks, puddings or cakes made with wholemeal flour or dried fruit, for example fruit scones, mince pies, fruit crumble  Biscuits made with wholemeal flour, oats, nuts or fruit, for example hobnobs, digestives, fig roll, fruit shortcake
<b>Confectionery</b>	Chocolate, fudge or toffee without dried fruit or nuts, boiled sweets, mints, chewy sweets	Chocolate and toffee made with dried fruits or nuts, popcorn, cereal bars

	<b>Suitable foods</b>	<b>Foods to avoid</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	Sugar, syrup, evaporated milk, seedless jam and marmalade, honey, lemon curd, custard, ice cream, jelly, milk puddings, salt, pepper, gravy, stock cubes	Jam and marmalade with seeds and peel, herbs with stalk and leaves, pickles and chutneys, chunky soups
<b>Drinks</b>	Teas, coffee, smooth fruit juice, squash, water	Fruit juice with 'bits' Fruit smoothies

**Please note: A low fibre diet does not always provide you with all the nutrients necessary to remain healthy. Please check with your doctor or dietitian for how long you need to follow this diet for. You may need a complete A - Z vitamin and mineral supplement if it is for longer than 4 weeks.**

## **Online resources for further information:**

- <https://gutscharity.org.uk>
- [www.nhs.uk/conditions/diverticular-disease-and-diverticulitis](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diverticular-disease-and-diverticulitis)
- Fibre: food fact sheet: [www.bda.uk.com/resource/fibre.html](http://www.bda.uk.com/resource/fibre.html)

## Action plan

## Action plan



**Name:**

**Date:**

**Dietitian:**

**Contact number:**



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