



Diverticular Disease

What is Diverticular disease?

A diverticulum is a small pouch or sac that herniates, bulges, out from any hollow structure in the body. A diverticulum of the colon is a herniation of the mucosa, lining, through the muscular layers of the bowel wall.

When there is more than one diverticulum they are referred to as diverticula.

Diverticula of the colon are often referred to as Diverticulosis or Diverticular disease.

What causes Diverticular disease?

More research is needed in this area but at present it is understood that when the diet lacks bulk and the volume of residue in the colon is small, the colon narrows and its contractions become more powerful increasing the pressure on the walls. This promotes formation of diverticula, which most commonly occur in the sigmoid colon.

What are the symptoms of Diverticular disease?

The majority of people with diverticular disease have no symptoms and are often unaware they have the condition. Some people have:

- a change in bowel habit, more constipation or more loose.
- discomfort, especially over the left lower abdomen as diverticular disease is more common in the sigmoid area.
- distension of the abdomen

and occasionally

- pain — if the diverticulum becomes inflamed
- passing of blood in the stool.

How is Diverticular disease diagnosed?

Diverticular disease can be diagnosed by:

- a colonoscopy, telescopic examination of the large bowel
- an X-ray of the colon, barium enema.

How can I treat Diverticular disease?

Once diverticula have formed they are permanent. For many people simply increasing vegetables in the diet will relieve their symptoms and return their bowel activity to normal. A high fibre diet is often helpful. Fibre adds bulk to keep other food substances moving through the digestive tract. Fibre also holds water and tends to soften the stool. A high fibre diet includes:

- wholemeal bread
- brown rice
- wholemeal pasta
- bran cereals
- fruit and vegetables

People who still experience abdominal discomfort and distension may require antispasmodic drugs. These reduce the spasm in the colon that can often cause these symptoms.

What complications can occur with Diverticular disease?

Diverticulitis: Inflammation of a diverticulum or diverticula probably due to bacterial infection. This is usually treated with antibiotics.

Perforation: A Diverticulum bursts and causes peritonitis, generalised inflammation of the abdominal cavity. This is serious and requires immediate surgery.

Abscess formation: A localised collection of pus close to the colon due to a small perforation. This can be treated with antibiotics or surgery.

Formation of a fistula: Perforation of a diverticulum into another structure such as the bladder or vagina. Surgery is necessary for treatment.

Bleeding: This can be minor or major. Usually it will stop and surgery is rarely required. Other causes of bleeding must be excluded.

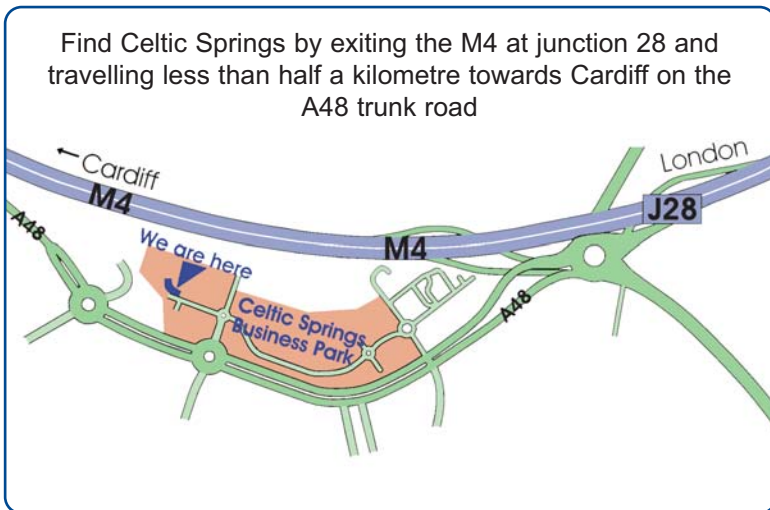
Is Diverticular disease common?

Diverticular disease is a very common condition in Western countries, especially as the population becomes older. Western diets consist of a lot of refined foods which are very low in fibre. Countries such as Africa where the diet has a high fibre content the incidence of diverticular disease is lower. However fibre may not be the whole story and more research is required.

For further information:
www.corecharity.org.uk

This fact sheet was designed to help you. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions of our specialists and nurses.

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