

Diverticulitis and Diverticulosis



Until our industrialized society started refining all the sugar and wheat in the early 1900's, diverticular disease was rare. The colon had lots of fiber and people far less often constipated. By straining to move your bowels the pressure on the colon pushes out weak areas in a normally smooth colon and we get the little marble sized "diverticula." These literally are full of stool all the time. At any time they may get infected like appendicitis and burst. Some have challenged the old advice to avoid popcorn and seeds that could get stuck in there, but I still believe it is smart to avoid little irritants like that.

The picture to the left shows a colon with lots of diverticulae. Some people have no symptoms from diverticulae and others get symptoms so bad that they have to have a portion of their bowel surgically removed. Some people with diverticulae also have no habit of constipation, so our knowledge and our treatment is still incomplete. It is common to have to use antibiotics to "quiet down" an infection caused by diverticulitis.

The most common symptom of diverticulitis is abdominal pain. The most common sign is tenderness around the left side of the lower abdomen. Infection may cause, fever, nausea, vomiting, chills, cramping, and as well.

We advocate increasing the amount of fiber in the diet although others (older-fashion) advise low fiber diets. Fiber keeps stool soft and lowers pressure inside the colon so that bowel contents can move through easily. The American Dietetic Association recommends 20 to 35 grams of fiber each day. The table below shows the amount of fiber in some foods that you can easily add to your diet.

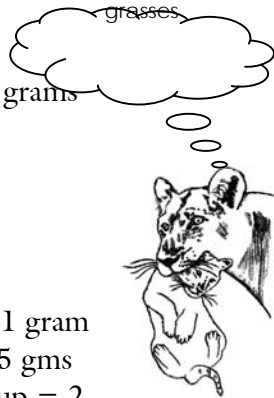
Fruits

apple, raw, with skin 1 medium = 4 grams
peach, raw 1 medium = 2 grams
pear, raw 1 medium = 4 grams
tangerine, raw 1 medium = 2 grams

Vegetables

Asparagus, fresh, cooked 4 spears = 1 gram
Broccoli, fresh, cooked 1/2 cup = 2.5 gms
Brussels sprouts, fresh, cooked 1/2 cup = 2 grams
Cabbage, fresh, cooked 1/2 cup = 1.5 grams
Carrot, fresh, cooked 1/2 cup = 2.5 grams
Cauliflower, fresh, cooked 1/2 cup = 1.5 grams
Romaine lettuce 1 cup = 1 gram
Spinach, fresh, cooked 1/2 cup = 2 grams
Summer squash, cooked 1 cup = 3 grams
Tomato, raw 1 = 1 gram

Elk fillets are less fiber than meadow grasses.



Starchy Vegetables

Baked beans, canned, plain 1/2 cup = 6.5 grams
Kidney beans, fresh, cooked 1/2 cup = 8 grams
Lima beans, fresh, cooked 1/2 cup = 6.5 grams
Potato, fresh, cooked 1 = 3 grams

Grains

Bread, whole-wheat 1 slice = 2 grams
Brown rice, cooked 1 cup = 2.5 grams
Cereal, bran flake 3/4 cup = 5 grams
Oatmeal, plain, cooked 3/4 cup = 3 grams
White rice, cooked 1 cup = 1 gram

We may also recommend taking a fiber product such as Citrucel or Metamucil once a day. These products are mixed with water and provide about 2 to 3.5 grams of fiber per tablespoon, mixed with 8 ounces of water.

Many suggest you avoid all foods with small seeds including great foods as tomatoes and strawberries because they believed that any small particles could lodge in the diverticula. However, it is now generally accepted that only certain food particles get caught in the diverticula and cause problems. Nuts, popcorn hulls, and sunflower, pumpkin, caraway, and sesame seeds should generally be avoided. The seeds in tomatoes, zucchini, cucumbers, strawberries, and raspberries, as well as poppy seeds, are generally considered harmless. You will over time make your own list of allowed & forbidden foods. Bon appetite!!!!

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