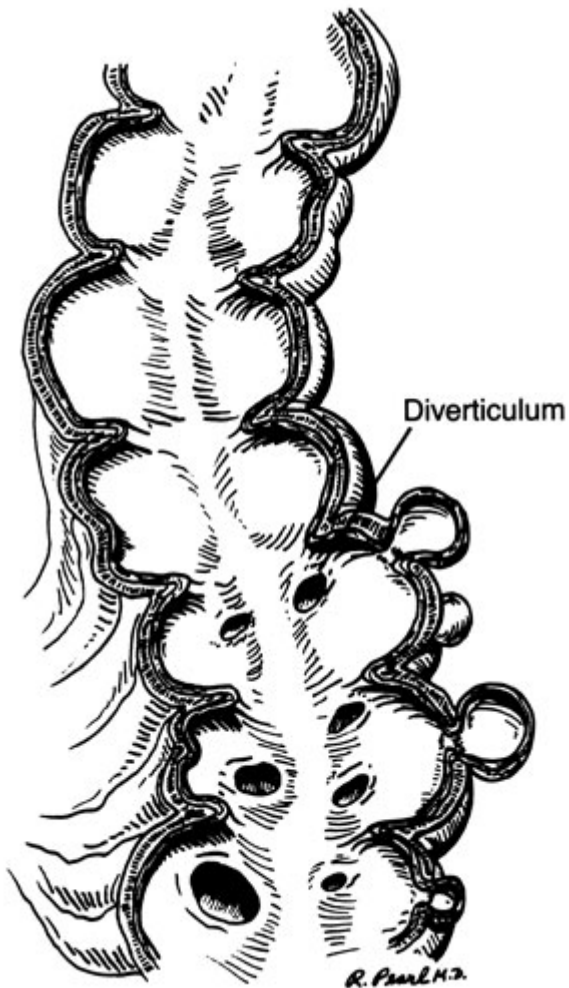


Diverticular Disease

Diverticulosis of the colon is a common condition that afflicts about 50 percent of Americans by age 60 and nearly all by age 80. Only a small percentage of those with diverticulosis have symptoms, and even fewer will ever require surgery.



What is Diverticulosis/ Diverticulitis?

Diverticula are pockets that develop in the colon wall, usually in the sigmoid or left colon, but may involve the entire colon. Diverticulosis describes the presence of these pockets. Diverticulitis describes inflammation or complications of these pockets.

What are the symptoms of diverticular disease?

Uncomplicated diverticular disease is usually not associated with symptoms. Symptoms are related to complications of diverticular disease including diverticulitis and bleeding. Diverticular disease is a common cause of significant bleeding from the colon.

Diverticulitis - an infection of the diverticula - may cause one or more of the following symptoms: pain in the abdomen, chills, fever and change in bowel habits. More intense symptoms are associated with serious complications such as perforation (rupture), abscess or fistula formation (an abnormal connection between the colon and another organ or the skin).

What is the cause of diverticular disease?

The cause of diverticulosis and diverticulitis is not precisely known, but it is more common for people with a low fiber diet. It is thought that a low-fiber diet over the years creates increased colon pressure and results in pockets or diverticula.

How is diverticular disease treated?

Increasing the amount of dietary fiber (grains, legumes, vegetables, etc.) - and sometimes restricting certain foods reduces the pressure in the colon and may decrease the risk of complications due to diverticular disease.

Diverticulitis requires different management. Mild cases may be managed with oral antibiotics, dietary restrictions and possibly stool softeners. More severe cases require hospitalization with intravenous antibiotics and dietary restraints. Most acute attacks can be relieved with such methods.

When is surgery necessary?

Surgery is reserved for patients with recurrent episodes of diverticulitis, complications or severe attacks when there's little or no response to medication. Surgery may also be required in individuals with a single episode of severe bleeding from diverticulosis or with recurrent episodes of bleeding.

Surgical treatment for diverticulitis removes the diseased part of the colon, most commonly, the left or sigmoid colon. Often the colon is hooked up or "anastomosed" again to the rectum. Complete recovery can be expected. Normal bowel function usually resumes in about three weeks. In emergency surgeries, patients may require a temporary colostomy bag. Patients are encouraged to seek medical attention for abdominal symptoms early to help avoid complications.