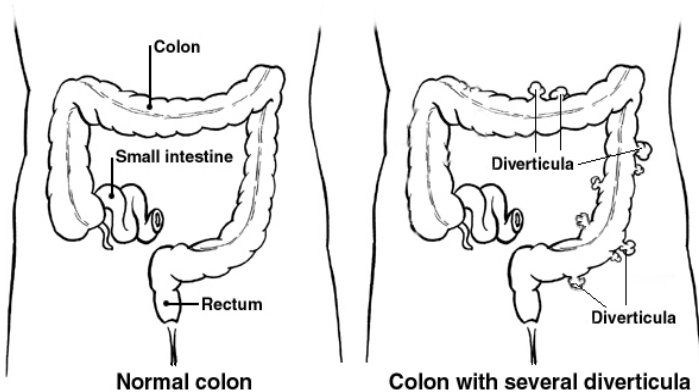


## What are diverticula?

Diverticula are small pouches that can form anywhere in the gut, most commonly in the sigmoid colon. They are formed when the bowel lining is stretched over time and loses elasticity. During a camera test such as colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy they look like little holes or caves in the bowel lining. When you have a few of these diverticula you have “diverticulosis”.



## Why have I developed this?

No one knows why diverticula form, but they are very common – 50% of people have them by age 50. Three quarters of people will eventually develop them.

Diverticula may just be a part of natural aging of the bowel, like the wrinkles we develop on our faces.

They are associated with a lack of dietary fibre. Some people probably have a genetic tendency to develop them. A lack of exercise and taking some medications may also diverticula more likely.

## Do I have a disease?

The term “diverticular disease” is a bit confusing. Both **diverticulosis** and **diverticulitis** are sometimes called “diverticular disease”.

Most people with diverticula have no symptoms and remain symptom free for the rest of their lives. We call this **diverticulosis** and it requires no treatment. This is not a disease.

Diverticula can become inflamed and cause lower abdominal pain. This inflammation is known as **diverticulitis**. Around 1 in 10 people with diverticulosis will develop diverticulitis. Diverticulitis can be recurrent and sometimes requires treatment with antibiotics, and very rarely can make people ill enough to require hospital treatment or even surgery.

## What should I look out for?

- Pain, usually in the lower abdomen and/or fever can be signs of diverticulitis
- Blood in your stool – around 5% of people may have bleeding from diverticula.

If you have any of these symptoms you should see your GP. More serious conditions such as bowel cancer can cause similar symptoms and a colonoscopy or CT scan is sometimes required to rule this out.

## Is there anything I can do to prevent problems from my diverticulosis?

Yes there are a few things you can do:

- Increase the soluble fibre in your diet (eat more vegetables, don't avoid nuts or seeds)
- Exercise moderately (half an hour three times a week)
- Don't smoke
- Avoid constipation (you may need laxatives if this is a problem for you)

## Anything else I should know about?

Sometimes diverticula in your bowel can make colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy more difficult

- You may need more medication to clear your bowel before the procedure than most people, as food debris and waste can get trapped in the pockets.
- The procedure may be harder to do for the doctor and may take a bit longer than usual.
- You may find the procedure more uncomfortable and require more medication.

## You can find more information here:

<https://patient.info/digestive-health/diverticula-diverticulosis-diverticular-disease-diverticulitis>