

# Eating Guidelines for Diverticular Disease

## Information About Diverticular Disease

Diverticular disease means having either diverticulosis or diverticulitis.

Diverticula are small pouches or sacs that form in the wall of the colon (large intestine).

Diverticulosis means having diverticula. There are usually no symptoms, but occasionally there may be constipation or bleeding.

Diverticulitis is when the pouches or sacs in the colon get inflamed or infected. Symptoms are pain or tenderness, usually in the left lower abdomen, diarrhea or constipation, nausea (and sometimes vomiting), and often fever, chills and cramping. If you have diverticulitis you may need to take medicine and stay in the hospital for a while. A liquid diet might be needed for a short period to give your bowel a rest. Once your symptoms improve, you can slowly start to eat more solids and in time return to a high fibre diet.

You should report symptoms of diverticulitis (constant pain, fever, and diarrhea) to your doctor.



## Steps you can take

The following steps you can take may help you prevent or control your diverticular disease.

- Enjoy a healthy diet that includes a wide variety of foods.
- Eat plenty of high fibre foods to get the recommended amount of fibre:

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Recommended fibre amount per day</i>
Men	19 - 50	38 grams
Men	>50	30 grams

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Recommended fibre amount per day</i>
Women	19 - 50	25 grams
Women	>50	21 grams

- The kind of fibre in fruits and vegetables may prevent diverticula from forming and may make symptoms of diverticular disease less severe. (Fibre will not repair diverticula that you already have.) Aim for 7 to 10 servings a day of vegetables and fruits to help you get enough fibre.
- Other foods that are high in fibre include: whole grain and bran cereals, whole grain bread, crackers and noodles, brown rice, and lentils and dried beans.
- Add high fibre foods slowly and a little at a time. Adding too much fibre all at once can cause gas and cramping.
- Drink 6 to 8 cups (1.5 to 2 L) of water each day. Fibre draws water into your stools to keep them soft, bulky and helps them pass

easily. Without liquids, fibre does not work properly.

- It is often recommended that people with diverticular disease avoid seeds, nuts, corn, popcorn and tomatoes, but there is no proof that this is needed or helpful.
- If you like red meat, you can include this as part of your healthy diet in portions suggested on "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide" [www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide), but also try other choices like fish, poultry, tofu, lentils and dried peas and beans. Some evidence suggests that eating large amounts of red meat might increase the risk of diverticular disease, but this has not been proven.
- Exercise regularly. In particular, intense exercise like running or jogging, combined with a high fibre diet, may help to lower the risk of diverticular disease. Follow the recommendations for your age in the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines, available at <http://www.csep.ca/english/view.asp?x=804>.

## Fibre Supplements and Diverticular Disease

There is no proof that taking fibre supplements like bran and methylcellulose helps to manage diverticular disease. However, you may wish to try these if you are not eating enough fibre or if you keep having symptoms while eating a high fibre diet. If you want to use fibre supplements, check with your doctor first.



## Additional Resources

HealthLinkBC File #68h Fibre and Your Health  
[www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68h.stm](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles/hfile68h.stm)

Canadian Society of Intestinal Research (CSIR) [www.badgut.com](http://www.badgut.com).  
CSIR a registered non-profit organization that is dedicated to increasing public awareness, providing patient education material, and funding medical research regarding a broad range of gastrointestinal diseases and disorders. Call 604-875-4875 (Greater Vancouver) or 1-866-600-4875.

*These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.*



## Notes

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Dietitian Services at HealthLink BC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to [www.healthlinkbc.ca/dietitian](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/dietitian) or call 8-1-1 (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.