

Community Endoscopy Service

Advice Sheet for Patients

Diverticular Disease

Diverticular disease is an extremely common benign (non – cancerous) condition of the colon (the large bowel or intestine), which affects a significant proportion of the British population. Its incidence increases with age and a majority of patients over seventy will have some evidence of it on bowel X-Rays.

Diverticular disease does not predispose the patient to other conditions and in particular it does not increase the risk of cancer developing in the bowel.

Diverticular disease appears as small pouches that protrude outward from the bowel wall which in itself is slightly thickened. This most commonly occurs in the bowel on the left side of the abdomen but it can occur at any point in the colon. What causes it is uncertain but it is felt that a relative lack of fibre in the Western diet over a long period may contribute to its appearance.

Diverticular disease is frequently an incidental finding on a bowel X-Ray and often it causes no significant symptoms. When it does cause trouble it most commonly causes:

- Disordered bowel habit in the form of constipation or an erratic bowel habit
- Abdominal discomfort or pain

The great majority of cases of diverticular disease require simple management with dietary manipulation alone. The intake of a diet rich in dietary fibre is generally very helpful and may prevent progression of the condition in the long term. This essentially means a diet containing

- Fresh fruit
- Green vegetables
- Any substances containing bran, (Unprocessed if possible; cooking or processing fibre such as bran reduces its efficacy).

In addition, fibre supplements such as Fybogel, Regulan or Isogel may be very useful to ensure adequate intake of unprocessed fibre. These are plant products and, like any fibre source, may be taken indefinitely without danger.

In general, although we often believe that we take an adequate amount of fibre in our diets the Western diet is often relatively deficient.

Diverticulitis:

Diverticulitis is a complication of simple diverticular disease. This happens when the diverticular disease becomes infected. Pain is the usual symptom accompanied by a high temperature and signs of infection in the blood cells and tenderness. This is generally treated by antibiotics.

Surgery is very rarely required for uncomplicated diverticular disease. In the few cases that this is necessary it means a major operation to remove that segment of the bowel.

Recourses on the web

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diverticular-disease-and-diverticulitis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<http://www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information/directory/d/diverticular-disease>

<http://www.corecharity.org.uk/Diverticular-disease.html>