DIVERTICULAR DISEASE

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

What Is Diverticulitis?

Diverticula are pockets or pouches that develop through weaknesses in the colon wall, but may involve the entire colon. Diverticulitis describes perforation or inflammation of the diverticulum.

What Are The Symptoms?

The major symptoms of diverticular disease are abdominal pain (usually in the lower left abdomen), diarrhea, cramps, alteration of bowel habit, and occasionally, severe rectal bleeding. These symptoms occur in a small percentage of patients with diverticulosis and are sometimes difficult to distinguish from other intestinal disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome.

Diverticulitis - an inflammation or infection of a diverticulum - may cause one or more of the following symptoms; pain, chills, fever, and change in bowel habits. Severe cases of diverticulitis may be complicated by infections in the abdomen, drainage tracts to the bladder or vagina, or bursting of the colon requiring emergency surgery.

What Is The Cause Of Diverticular Disease?

Indications are that a low-fiber diet over many years created increased colon pressure and results in the development of diverticula.

How Is Diverticular Disease Treated?

Mild symptoms of diverticular disease are usually treated by medications to help control pain, cramps, and change of bowel habits. Increasing the amount of dietary fiber (grains, vegetables, etc.) and sometimes restricting certain foods reduces pressure in the colon so that complications are less likely to arise.

Diverticulitis requires more intense management. Mild causes may be managed without hospitalization, but this is a decision best made by your physician. Treatment usually consists of oral antibiotics, dietary restrictions and possibly stool softeners. Severe cases require hospitalization with intravenous antibiotics and strict dietary restraints. Most acute cases can be relieved with such methods.
**When Is Surgery Necessary?**

Surgery is indicated for recurrent episodes, complications or severe attacks when there is little or no response to medication. In surgery, usually part of the colon - commonly the left or sigmoid colon - is removed and the colon is reconnected or “anastomose”: to the rectum. Complete recovery can be expected. Normal bowel function usually resumes in 1-3 weeks.

**Who Performs This Type Of Surgery?**

Colon and rectal surgeons are experts in the surgical and non-surgical treatment of colon and rectal problems. They have completed advanced training in the treatment of colon and rectal problems in addition to full training in general surgery. Colon and rectal surgeons treat benign and malignant conditions, perform routine screening examinations and treat problems surgically when necessary.