



UNIVERSITY MEDICAL GROUP

Department of Surgery  
Colon & Rectal Division

# **DIVERTICULOSIS AND DIVERTICULITIS**

## Understanding and Managing Two Common Colon Conditions

### **Trouble in Your Colon**

You may be having trouble in your **colon** (the large intestine). Small pouches may have formed in your colon wall. Many people have this condition, called diverticulosis. If these pouches become infected or inflamed, a painful and more serious condition called diverticulitis has developed. Aging may contribute to colon conditions. But eating plenty of unprocessed, high-fiber foods may make a difference in the health of your colon.

### **Making Your Colon Healthier**

You and your doctor can discuss how to control your diverticular condition. Diet changes or medications may be enough to bring relief. In severe cases, surgery may be needed. Either way, the better you understand your body and your condition, the more you'll benefit from treatment and be able to avoid colon problems in the future.

### **Pressure Causes Pouches**

A healthy colon is flexible tube lined with muscles. These muscles help move **stool** (waste) through your colon into your **rectum** (the lower part of the colon) and out of your body. With enough fiber and water, stool stays soft and passes smoothly through your colon.

But if pressure builds up inside your colon, diverticulosis may occur.

### **Diverticulosis: Pouches Form**

Without enough fiber and water in your digestive system, stool becomes harder. Your colon's muscles have to squeeze more to move the harder stools through your colon. That extra pressure can cause the lining of the colon wall to bulge out into pouches called **diverticula**. This usually occurs in the colon's muscular, lower left section (**sigmoid**), though it can also occur in the other parts of the colon. Diverticula may take years to develop and there are often no noticeable symptoms. If you do have symptoms, they might include mild cramping, bloating, constipation, diarrhea, or urgency. In rare cases, heavy rectal bleeding can occur with diverticulosis. Any bleeding, even small amounts, should be reported to your doctor.

### **Diverticulitis: Pouches Are Infected**

Diverticulitis occurs when the diverticula become infected or inflamed. The cause of these infections is unknown, but it's possible that they begin when stool lodges in the opening of the diverticula. Infection can lead to complications such as swelling or rupturing of the diverticula. Symptoms often include pain, fever, and chills. In severe cases, infection of the abdominal cavity (**peritonitis**) may result.