Sigmoid Diverticulitis

What is it?

Diverticulitis is inflammation or irritation of the colon. The sigmoid colon is the last portion of the colon, or large intestine, before it empties into the rectum. This part of the colon is prone to developing outpouchings known as diverticuli. If particles of food or stool become trapped within these, inflammation may result from it.

What causes it?

Diverticuli result from diets low in fiber, which are very common in the United States. Certain patients with diverticuli will have food or stool particles become entrapped within these, which leads to inflammation and irritation. Certain foods such as popcorn, seeds, and nuts are more likely to cause attacks.

What are the symptoms?

Diverticulitis causes pain in the lower abdomen. It may be accompanied by fevers, chills, and nausea.

How is it diagnosed?

Diverticulitis is diagnosed by CT scans, which show inflammation of the colon, as well as any infected pockets of fluid near the colon.

Treatment options

During an attack of diverticulitis, the first treatments are antibiotics. In mild cases, these may be taken by mouth as an outpatient. In more severe instances, patients may require hospitalization for intravenous antibiotics and potentially surgery.

If patients have severe episodes of diverticulitis or have repeated episodes, surgery can be performed on an elective basis to prevent repeated attacks. Surgery involves removing the affected segment of the colon. A person has 5-7 feet of colon, and this operation removes only 12-15 inches of it. The colon is then reconnected so that bowel function is unchanged.

Surgery is typically performed through small incisions using a technique called laparoscopy. The colon is removed through a small incision at the belly button. Surgery takes 2-3 hours, and patients remain in the hospital for 3-5 days afterward. Surgery is safe; however, some risks are involved. If the colon cannot be removed through small incisions, a larger incision in the lower abdomen may be necessary. When the colon is reconnected, the connection needs to heal properly. If it does not, a repeat operation may be necessary. The risk of this occurring is 2-3%. 

This information is not intended to replace a visit with your physician. To make an appointment with one of our surgeons, please call 614-293-3230.