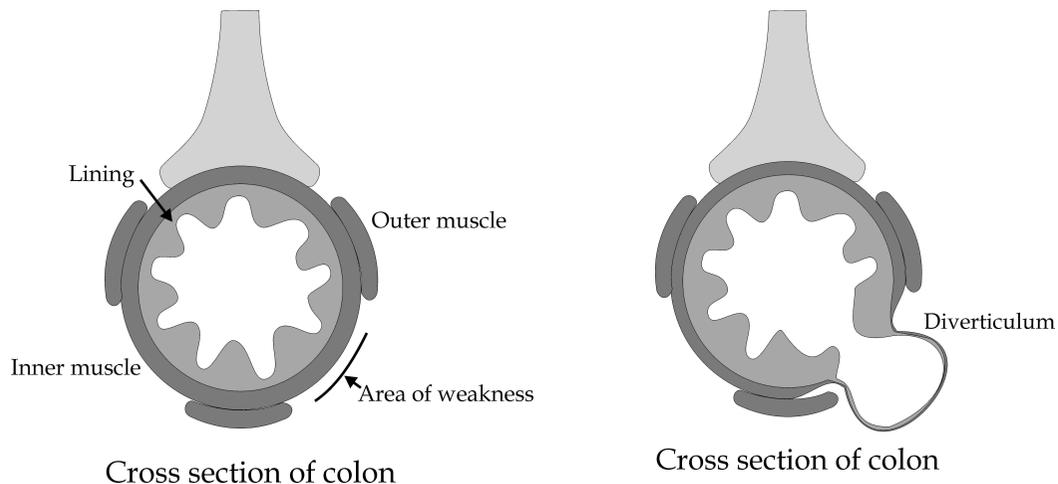


### What is diverticular disease?

The wall of the large bowel (colon) is made up of several layers. The outer most layer of muscle does not completely surround the colon and this can lead to areas of relative weakness in the colon wall.

In some people these areas of weakness can allow little out-pouches ('dog ears') of the lining of the colon to occur. These 'dog ears' are what we call diverticula. The reason why they form is not completely understood but we know that they are more common in people with a 'Western' diet low in fibre and roughage. Only rarely are they caused by a weakness which the patient is born with.

Just having these 'dog ears' is what we call Diverticular Disease.



### What problems can the diverticula cause?

The great majority of people with Diverticular Disease suffer no ill effects from it at all. It is often found 'by accident' during investigations of the colon. It is increasing common with advancing age and a large number of people over the age of 65 will have at least a few diverticula in their colon.

Occasionally, the diverticula can give rise to intermittent, 'gripey' abdominal pain like 'irritable bowel syndrome'.

On rare occasions the diverticula can become inflamed or infected. When this happens the condition is called Diverticulitis and is typified by abdominal pain, tenderness and a temperature.

If this inflammation is severe, an abscess can develop on the colon and in rare circumstances, the infection may spread outside the colon to give rise to peritonitis (like a perforated appendix).

In some people the blood vessels next to the diverticula can bleed giving rise to alarming but usually self limiting bleeding from the back passage. This is somewhat like a 'nose bleed' from the colon.

### What treatment is necessary?

Once they have formed, the diverticula do not go away. The best treatment is to increase the amount of fibre in the diet to keep the bowel habit regular. This helps to prevent complications from developing and more diverticula from forming. The best source of fibre in the diet is bran but additional fibre can also be taken in the form of fibre drinks or supplements.

### What happens when complications occur?

The commonest complication is diverticulitis. This inflammation is usually effectively treated by resting the bowel and suppressing any infection with antibiotics. This may need to be done in hospital but, if mild, can be treated at home by your GP.

Only very rarely does the inflammation not settle down or lead to peritonitis. In these circumstances, an operation may be necessary to remove the affected portion of the colon.

If recurrent infections keep occurring, a prolonged course of antibiotics may be useful. If this fails and the bowel refuses to 'settle down', surgery may very rarely be required.

### Is this related to cancer of the colon?

There is NO direct link between diverticular disease and cancer.

Unfortunately they can both occur together and if there is any doubt as to the cause of the symptoms, an Xray, CT scan or endoscopy test of the bowel is usually arranged.

# *Diverticular Disease*

## *Patient Information*

**Mr Neil R Borley**  
Consultant Colorectal Surgeon

Imperial Medical Group  
Cheltenham Nuffield Hospital  
Hatherley Lane  
Cheltenham, GL51 6SY  
01242 246526

[www.cheltenham-colorectal.org.uk](http://www.cheltenham-colorectal.org.uk)

