Diverticulitis Complications

It is truly amazing that so few people that have diverticulosis actually end up with any type of complication, especially when you compare this to the number of people who have this condition. Yet, there are complications that do occur and when they do some can be very serious and dangerous.

- **Diverticulitis:** As the diverticulum develops it creates a thin wall in that area of the colon. The colon is a great home to many good bacteria, and that is beneficial as long as those bacteria remain in the colon. Sometimes these bacteria have been known to seep through these thin walled diverticulum thus causing the infection called diverticulitis. Some get only a mild case with a little discomfort in their lower left abdomen area. Others experience extreme pain and tenderness along with a fever. It is very important to seek the medical attention of your doctor to have it checked out and to start a round of antibiotics. The remainder of the treatment will require either a liquid or high fiber diet to give the bowels time to heal and rest. In dire cases patients will be hospitalized to help get control the symptoms and infection.

- **Bleeding:** Up to about 25% of all patients with diverticulitis may experience bleeding. It can begin when a blood vessel ruptures in the diverticuli and as a result it may produce blood from the rectum or if the bleeding is from the right of the colon it could cause black stools. Sometimes the bleeding may stop by itself and not require any further treatment. However, if you have any kind of bleeding from the rectum you should consult your doctor, for if the bleeding continues surgery may be required.

- **Abscess, Perforations, Peritonitis:** These are the most dangerous complications connected to diverticulosis. They are the least common, but the most serious. When a diverticulitis infection does not clear up after a few days on antibiotics, and the conditions worsen, an abscess may develop in the colon. An abscess occurs when an infected area creates pus that may cause swelling, and then destroys the tissue of the colon. When an abscess is small and stays in the colon, it can be cleared up with antibiotics. However if the antibiotics do not clear it up the doctor may need to drain it. The procedure to drain the abscess is called percutaneous catheter drainage; this is a simple procedure that the doctor inserts a small needle through the skin and drains the fluid into a catheter tube. Occasionally surgery is needed to clean the smaller abscess and if necessary remove the infected part of the colon. A larger abscess can actually become a very serious problem. When the infected contents of the intestine leaks out and spreads into the abdominal cavity it is called peritonitis. This will require immediate surgery to clean out the abdominal cavity and remove the infected damaged area of the colon. Although rare, if this is ignored and goes without surgery peritonitis can be fatal.

- **Fistula:** This is a formation of an abnormal connection of tissues generally between two organs, or an organ and the skin. A fistula occurs during an infection when damaged tissues come into contact with each other, attach themselves, and then heal that way. When the
infection related to an abscess spreads outside the colon the colon's tissue may attach to nearby tissues generally the bladder, skin, or small intestine. Generally the most common fistula is between the colon and bladder which can result in an intense long-lasting infection of the urinary tract. This problem can be taken care of with surgery to remove the affected part of the colon and fistula.

- **Intestinal Obstruction:** This is when scarring caused by the infection of the colon causes a partial or total blockage of the large intestines. When this occurs, the bowel contents can not be moved normally by the colon. When the intestinal obstruction completely blocks off the intestine emergency surgery is necessary. A partial blockage is not an emergency; however it will still require a planned surgery to correct it.