Dear Alice,

Can stress bring on a diverticulitis attack?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Diverticulosis [2] occurs when a person develops diverticula, or small protrusions, in the walls of their large and small intestines, stomach, and/or esophagus. Diverticula are usually benign, but they can sometimes become infected or inflamed, leading to a condition called diverticulitis. While dormant diverticulosis is extremely common in Americans, diverticulitis has specific risk factors that can make attacks happen more or less frequently. Although many people believe that stress is one of these risk factors, this has not been scientifically shown.

Risk factors for diverticulitis do include:

- **Getting older.** The exact reason for this is not known, but people over 40 years old have a higher incidence of diverticulitis. It could be because intestinal walls naturally weaken and lose elasticity as people age.
- **Eating a low-fiber diet.** While diverticulitis is extremely common in Western countries, it is practically non-existent in many South Asian and African countries where typical diets are high in fiber. Eating fiber makes stools softer and bulkier, putting less strain on your intestines when you pass them.
- **Not drinking enough fluids.** Fluids work with fiber to soften the stool in your bowel. In fact, eating fiber without drinking sufficient fluids can actually increase constipation instead of preventing it.
- **Not exercising.** Exercising keeps your intestines working normally and prevents constipation, which places diverticula-creating pressure on your bowel walls.
- **Obesity and smoking.** While the mechanisms for these risk factors aren?t understood, obesity and cigarette smoking increases the risk for diverticulitis.

Although stress isn?t on this list, that doesn?t mean it?s not contributing to attacks of diverticulitis that you may be experiencing. Many people struggle with self-care when they are stressed, and that may mean practicing unhealthy habits like eating junk food, skipping workouts, or smoking cigarettes. Try to avoid these behaviors the next time you?re going...
through a stressful time, and see if that helps you avoid a bout of diverticulitis. Actively trying to reduce your stress by following the tips in Number one cause of stress [3] can be a good place to start!

Alice!
Category:
General Health [4]
Aches, Pains & Other Ailments [5]
Body Maintenance [6]

Related questions

Diverticulitis diet causes too much weight loss? help! [7]
Hunting for whole grains [8]
Benefits of eating fiber [9]
Stress, anxiety, and learning to cope [10]

Resources

Stressbusters (Morningside) [11]
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