

# Severe Diverticulitis Is Rising Rapidly Among Younger Adults

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › Diverticulitis, once considered a disease of aging, is now surging among adults under 50, with younger patients facing more severe and complicated cases than ever before
- › Researchers from UCLA and Vanderbilt University found that early-onset diverticulitis hospitalizations rose sharply from 2005 to 2020, while procedures like abscess drainage more than doubled
- › Younger adults have an 82% lower risk of death compared to older patients, but far higher odds of requiring invasive interventions — proof that the disease is becoming more disruptive, not less
- › Processed foods, seed oils, chronic stress, and disrupted gut bacteria are key drivers of early inflammation in your colon, damaging your intestinal barrier and setting the stage for diverticulitis
- › You can protect your gut by removing seed oils, eating easy-to-digest whole foods, rebuilding beneficial bacteria like Akkermansia, and supporting mitochondrial energy production to restore gut balance and long-term colon health

Diverticulitis has quietly become a younger person's disease. Once linked almost exclusively to aging, it's now showing up with growing frequency in adults who are decades away from retirement. Many people in their 30s and 40s are discovering that

persistent abdominal discomfort, bloating, or unpredictable bowel habits aren't just stress or diet-related annoyances but signs of deeper inflammation brewing in the colon.

At its core, diverticulitis is inflammation in small pouches that develop along weak spots in your colon wall. These pouches often remain harmless for years, but when inflammation sets in, they become painful and disruptive. If left unaddressed, infection or rupture can follow, setting off a cascade of complications that demand urgent care. What's changed is how early in life this process begins — and how aggressively it's progressing.

The reality is that younger adults are living in an environment that strains gut health at every level — ultraprocessed foods, chronic stress, poor sleep, and environmental toxins all chip away at the delicate balance of bacteria and energy production that keeps your colon strong. This imbalance fuels inflammation, weakens intestinal barriers, and sets the stage for diseases that used to appear only later in life.

This reversal in age trends mirrors what's happening with colorectal cancer, which is also rising among younger adults. The parallel patterns raise serious questions about what's driving gut inflammation across the population — from diet and environmental toxins to microbiome disruption.

Understanding why this pattern is emerging — and what's driving the increase in serious colon inflammation among younger adults — is the first step toward reversing it. The latest research sheds light on exactly how this change unfolded and what it reveals about the health habits shaping modern digestion.

## **Younger Adults Now Face a Faster, Harder-Hitting Form of Diverticulitis**

A comprehensive analysis published in *Diseases of the Colon & Rectum* examined over 5.2 million hospital admissions for [diverticulitis](#) between 2005 and 2020.<sup>1</sup> The research, led by UCLA's Shineui Kim and Vanderbilt University's Dr. Aimal Khan, sought to

understand how diverticulitis is changing across generations. What they discovered marks a major shift in who this disease affects.

While diverticulitis was once considered a disorder of aging, the study found that 16% of all hospitalizations were now in adults under 50 – a number that has grown steadily year after year.<sup>2</sup> Even more alarming, complicated cases in this younger group – those involving abscesses, perforations, or other severe infections – increased from 18.5% to 28.2% over the study period.

- **Younger patients are being hospitalized more often – and with more serious disease** – The data show a clear trend toward earlier and more aggressive forms of diverticulitis. Younger adults are ending up in hospitals not for mild inflammation, but for the kind that leads to dangerous internal infections. Complicated diverticulitis is far more serious than the uncomplicated type, which is often treated at home with dietary adjustments.

The complicated form frequently requires procedures like percutaneous drainage – where a radiologist inserts a tube through your skin to remove infected fluid – or even colectomy, surgery to remove a portion of the colon. The sharp rise in these serious cases indicates that whatever is driving this disease is becoming more potent in younger populations.

- **Fewer younger adults are undergoing colon removal, but more are requiring invasive drainage procedures** – Interestingly, colectomy rates among younger patients fell dramatically – from 34.7% to 20.3% – while the number needing drainage procedures more than doubled, climbing from 12.7% to 28.6%.

This shift suggests that while physicians are becoming more skilled at saving healthy colon tissue, they're treating increasingly complex infections that require high-tech interventions. These patients recover faster and leave the hospital sooner, but the disease itself appears more aggressive and unpredictable.

- **Hospital stays are shorter, costs are lower – but the disease is hitting a younger, more active population** – The study found that younger adults with diverticulitis had 0.28 fewer days in the hospital on average and paid roughly \$1,900 less per visit than older patients. On the surface, this sounds like an improvement, but it hides a deeper concern.

These are people in their working years, with careers and families, now sidelined by a disease that was once associated with retirement age. The direct costs of shorter stays don't reflect the broader loss of productivity, chronic gut discomfort, or the emotional toll of recurring flare-ups.

- **Younger patients show lower death rates but higher odds of needing serious interventions** – Mortality among younger patients was significantly lower than in older adults, with early-onset diverticulitis linked to an 82% lower risk of death during hospitalization. However, younger patients had 29% higher odds of needing colectomy and 58% higher odds of requiring percutaneous drainage.

This combination – low mortality but high intervention rates – points to a disease that is less deadly but far more disruptive. That means the risk isn't necessarily dying from diverticulitis but living with its complications or undergoing repeated hospitalizations.

- **The findings reveal an unsettling connection between lifestyle and gut inflammation** – There are several possible drivers behind this generational shift. Diets high in **processed foods**, refined carbohydrates, and **seed oils** inflame your colon and weaken its structure. Sedentary behavior and chronic stress further strain gut function, while obesity increases pressure inside your colon.

Over time, these factors could trigger the formation of weak spots where diverticula – tiny bulging pouches – develop. Once inflamed or infected, they cause pain, bloating, and fever. Without prompt management, these weak spots can rupture, leading to severe infection or sepsis.

# A Growing Overlap with Early-Onset Colorectal Cancer Raises Urgent Questions

This rise in early-onset diverticulitis mirrors the concerning increase in [colorectal cancer](#) among younger Americans.<sup>3</sup> Both conditions involve inflammation, [bacterial imbalance](#), and damage to the lining of your colon. This parallel trend hints at shared underlying causes – perhaps linked to environmental toxins, gut microbiome disruption, or long-term [dietary changes](#) that promote chronic inflammation. If you've ever assumed colon problems only develop later in life, this research proves that assumption is dangerously outdated.

- **Modern living could be reshaping your microbiome in ways that set the stage for inflammation** – While the paper didn't focus on microbiome analysis, it raises logical questions about the role of gut bacteria in this disease shift. Processed diets, excessive alcohol use, and exposure to seed oils damage the delicate balance of bacteria in your colon.

When oxygen-loving bacteria dominate, they release endotoxins that irritate your colon wall. Over time, this weakens the tissue, forming small outpouchings that become infection sites during stress, illness, or constipation. This imbalance might explain why younger people – who grew up during the rise of ultraprocessed foods – are increasingly vulnerable.

- **New management approaches reflect progress, but prevention remains the real goal** – Doctors are now reserving surgery for the most severe cases, focusing instead on targeted [antibiotics](#) and minimally invasive drainage techniques. These improvements have reduced hospital stays and costs, but they do nothing to address why more young adults are getting sick in the first place.
- **Your everyday choices influence whether this disease progresses – or doesn't start at all** – The findings underscore how daily habits – what you eat, how long you sit, and how you manage stress – affect the health of your colon. Reducing

processed foods, avoiding seed oils, and eating easy-to-digest carbohydrates that nourish beneficial bacteria protect against early colon inflammation.

Taking control of your gut health isn't about reacting to disease – it's about preventing it. The data from UCLA and Vanderbilt offer both a warning and an opportunity: the disease is getting younger, but awareness gives you the power to stay ahead of it.

## How to Protect Your Gut and Stop Diverticulitis Before It Starts

If you've ever felt a dull ache or pressure in your abdomen after eating, or dealt with unexplained bloating and [constipation](#) that just won't go away, you're not alone.

Diverticulitis doesn't appear out of nowhere – it builds slowly as inflammation damages your colon wall and your gut bacteria fall out of balance.

The cause almost always traces back to a disrupted microbiome and low cellular energy production. Your gut health depends on how well your cells generate energy to maintain an oxygen-free environment where beneficial bacteria thrive. When that energy falters, harmful bacteria take over, inflammation rises, and diverticulitis follows. Below are five focused steps to rebuild your gut, restore balance, and support lasting colon health.

- 1. Eliminate inflammatory fats and restore cellular energy** – The first step to healing your colon is to stop consuming the fats that destroy it. Seed oils – corn, soybean, sunflower, safflower, and canola – contain [linoleic acid](#) (LA), which accumulates in your tissues and breaks down into toxic byproducts that damage your gut lining.

When consumed in excess, these oils also disrupt your [mitochondria](#) – the tiny energy factories inside your cells – making it harder for your gut to stay oxygen-free. Without that oxygen-free balance, harmful bacteria begin to dominate.

Replace seed oils with tallow, ghee, or grass fed butter. By doing this, you lower oxidative stress, protect mitochondrial function, and give your gut the energy it needs to repair. Aim to keep daily LA intake under 5 grams, ideally closer to 2

grams. When my [Mercola Health Coach app](#) launches, the Seed Oil Sleuth feature will help you track this down to the tenth of a gram.

- 2. Rebuild your gut microflora to lower inflammation** – Your gut is the command center of your metabolism, and when it's inflamed, every system in your body feels it. Low energy, brain fog, mood swings, and poor digestion all trace back to one root problem – a damaged microbiome. The first step is to restore your gut terrain before you overload it with fiber or raw vegetables.

Fiber has value once your gut is healed, but in a damaged state it fuels the wrong bacteria, triggering more inflammation instead of repair.

Start simple. Fruit and white rice are gentle carb sources that nourish your cells without feeding endotoxin-producing microbes. Once your digestion steadies, layer in cooked root vegetables, then legumes, and finally whole grains. Healing always follows sequence – your gut needs to calm before it can handle complexity.

As balance returns, beneficial bacteria like *Akkermansia muciniphila* begin to flourish. *Akkermansia* produces mucin, a gel-like barrier that protects your intestinal wall and prevents toxins from leaking into your bloodstream. As it grows, it encourages colonies of other species that generate [butyrate](#) – the short-chain fat that heals your gut lining, lowers inflammation, and stabilizes your appetite.

To support this ecosystem, eat polyphenol-rich fruits such as blueberries, pomegranates, and cherries. Avoid seed oils and ultraprocessed foods that poison *Akkermansia* and destroy your microbial diversity. The goal is simple: rebuild your gut's protective terrain so beneficial bacteria thrive and endotoxin-producing strains starve.

- 3. Support your mitochondria to maintain a healthy gut environment** – Your gut health depends on energy – specifically, the energy your mitochondria produce inside every cell lining your digestive tract. When mitochondrial output drops, your colon loses its ability to maintain the oxygen-free environment your beneficial bacteria depend on.

Oxygen leaks in, suffocating the good and empowering the bad. Those oxygen-tolerant pathogens release endotoxins that inflame your gut and further choke off energy production, locking you into a vicious metabolic loop. To break that loop, you need to restore your energy metabolism.

Aim for roughly 250 grams of healthy carbohydrates each day. Glucose is your body's preferred fuel, and your mitochondria cannot function optimally without it. The problem isn't carbs – it's eating them when your gut terrain is still inflamed. If you feel bloated, sluggish, or tired after meals, that's a signal your gut is releasing too many endotoxins and your mitochondria are underperforming.

Once your digestion steadies, those same carbohydrates – from fruits, root vegetables, and properly prepared starches – become therapeutic. They feed butyrate-producing microbes, which in turn fuel your colon cells directly. This closed loop – carbs feeding bacteria, bacteria producing butyrate, butyrate energizing cells – is how you repair your gut from the inside out.

When your mitochondria and microbiome are synchronized, oxygen stays where it belongs, inflammation recedes, and your colon regains its natural rhythm and resilience. That's how true healing begins: by restoring the flow of energy through every level of your biology.

- 4. Use targeted therapies to calm inflammation and revive damaged cells** – Certain natural compounds help lower inflammation and protect cellular health. Dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) is one example. It enhances circulation, reduces oxidative stress, and stabilizes damaged tissues, making it useful for inflammatory conditions that affect your gut.

**DMSO** penetrates deeply into cells and acts as a carrier molecule, helping oxygen and nutrients reach areas where circulation is poor while easing swelling and discomfort.

When used properly, it helps restore your colon's integrity and reduce the inflammation that drives diverticulitis. Pair this with magnesium to relax your gut muscles and ease spasms, and you support both cellular repair and smoother digestion.

**5. Reinforce daily habits that nurture your colon long term** – Healing your gut isn't a quick fix – it's the result of consistent daily choices. Limit antibiotics to absolute necessity, as they wipe out both harmful and beneficial bacteria. Eat slowly, chew thoroughly, and avoid eating late at night to give your digestive system time to rest.

Move your body throughout the day; walking after meals improves blood flow and reduces internal pressure on your colon wall. **Manage stress** with proper breathing, restorative sleep and positive thinking.

If you stay consistent with these steps, you'll feel your digestion shift – less bloating, steadier energy, and a calmer gut. You'll be rebuilding your microbiome, recharging your mitochondria, and strengthening your body's most powerful defense against diverticulitis: a colon that's energized, balanced, and resilient from the inside out.

## **FAQs About Diverticulitis in Young Adults**

**Q: Why are more younger adults developing diverticulitis?**

**A:** Hospital data show a sharp rise in early-onset diverticulitis, meaning adults under 50 are now being hospitalized more often – and with more severe cases. This shift is linked to lifestyle and environmental changes such as diets high in processed foods and seed oils, chronic stress, poor sleep, and disrupted gut microbiomes. These factors weaken your intestinal barrier, fuel inflammation, and trigger infection in your colon's weak spots much earlier in life.

**Q: What are the warning signs of diverticulitis I should look for?**

**A:** Common symptoms include abdominal pain (often on the lower left side), bloating, constipation, diarrhea, and occasional bleeding. In more advanced or "complicated" cases, you might experience fever, chills, or severe tenderness in your abdomen – signs that an abscess or infection could be forming. If these occur, immediate medical attention is required.

**Q: How can I lower my risk of developing diverticulitis?**

**A:** Focus on rebuilding your gut terrain and supporting mitochondrial energy production. Remove seed oils from your diet, since LA from these oils inflames and weakens your colon wall. Eat easy-to-digest carbohydrates such as fruit and white rice while your gut heals, then reintroduce root vegetables, legumes, and whole grains slowly. Movement and stress management also play major roles in maintaining gut health.

**Q: What role do gut bacteria like Akkermansia and compounds like butyrate play in gut healing?**

**A:** Akkermansia muciniphila strengthens your intestinal barrier by producing mucin, a protective gel that shields your gut lining. As it thrives, it supports other beneficial bacteria that create butyrate – a short-chain fatty acid that repairs your gut lining, lowers inflammation, and stabilizes appetite and blood sugar. Together, they help restore a balanced, oxygen-free environment where healthy microbes flourish.

**Q: What practical steps can I take today to prevent or manage diverticulitis naturally?**

**A:** Start by cutting all seed oils and ultraprocessed foods. Replace them with whole, nutrient-dense meals using tallow, ghee, or grass fed butter. Support your microbiome with polyphenol-rich fruits like blueberries and pomegranates, and move your body regularly to reduce pressure inside your colon. Manage stress daily and get restorative sleep. Consistency is key – these habits lower inflammation, strengthen your gut barrier, and protect against future flare-ups.

## Sources and References

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- <sup>1</sup> [Diseases of the Colon & Rectum May 2025, 68\(5\):p 562-571](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [UCLA News October 31, 2025](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians March 1, 2023](#)