

Etiology of Diverticulosis

Jonathan Isbit

To the Editor—I would like to comment on the recent article by Dr. Anne F. Peery titled “Colonic Diverticula and Diverticular Disease: 10 Facts Clinicians Should Know” [1]. I am afraid that the author failed to address a key question: What causes diverticulosis and how can it be prevented?

The etiology of diverticulosis has baffled the medical profession for over a century. Beginning in the 1970s, Dr. Denis Burkitt’s fiber theory was promoted as the explanation for diverticulosis, colorectal cancer, appendicitis, and other “Western” colon diseases. As Peery points out, her 2012 study finally debunked that theory in regard to diverticulosis. Other studies have disproved the claim that fiber protects against colorectal cancer.

The problem is that Peery and her colleagues overlooked part of Burkitt’s hypothesis. He actually proposed 2 distinct theories. During his service in Africa, Burkitt observed not only Africans’ dietary habits but also their method of defecation. The natural squatting position, used by all primates—including most humans—protects the colon from undue strain and also promotes complete evacuation.

The sitting toilet posture causes diverticula in 4 ways. First, the rectum is choked by the puborectalis muscle and must be forced open by straining, which, over time, causes herniations. Second, since the exit is obstructed, waste gets backed up in the sigmoid colon, where it puts constant pressure on the colon wall. Third, the colon is deprived of the natural support provided by the thighs when squatting. On a squat toilet, the thighs serve the same function as the belt worn by a weightlifter to prevent hernias. Fourth, the kink at the rectosigmoid junction tightens as the sigmoid colon is pushed downwards by the Valsalva Maneuver. This is the

main reason why 95% of diverticulitis cases involve the sigmoid colon.

Burkitt downplayed the squatting theory because he knew that the public was uncomfortable discussing such a taboo subject. Instead, he highlighted the more palatable “input” side of the theory, which turned out to be invalid.

I have been studying the benefits of squatting for the past 15 years. I believe that this discovery can solve many medical mysteries, dramatically reduce health care costs, and prevent needless suffering. It will not happen overnight; indeed, it may take decades to overcome the taboo and change society’s habits. But we have to begin by doing research to confirm the most plausible explanation for diverticular disease and other colorectal ailments that plague the Western world. **NCMJ**

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Potential conflicts of interest. J.I. holds a patent for Nature’s Platform, which allows the user to squat over a conventional toilet.

Reference

1. Peery AF. Colonic diverticula and diverticular disease: 10 facts clinicians should know. *N C Med J*. 2016;77(3):220-222.

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