With all the advice that those with diverticulosis receive to follow a high fiber, healthy natural diet (which is extremely important and sometimes difficult) there will be the times when a flare up period of diverticulitis occurs and then its time to switch gears fast, and I mean fast.

Switching those gears to a low residue diet could be of the utmost importance to help speed up the healing process. A low residue diet will more than likely be recommended by your doctor during the flare up periods, as it also generally recommended for pre and post operations to decrease the bowel volume. A suggested low residue diet will generally contain less than 10 – 12 grams of fiber per day, as opposed to a high fiber diet that suggest at between 25 - 35 grams of fiber per day.

The purpose of a low residue diet is to help reduce the volume and frequency of stools all the while prolonging the transit time in the intestinal track. It is somewhat similar to a low fiber diet; however it will generally include restrictions on foods that will increase the activity of the bowels, such as prune juice, milk and milk products. A low residue diet has limited amounts of partially digested or undigested ingredients. In the medical field residue is defined as the solid contents that have reached the lower intestine.

The main source of residue comes from the fiber in various foods like:

- dried fruits
- whole grain breads
- cereals and pastas
- nuts
- seeds
- the skins and stalks of vegetables and fruits

Sometimes you may hear the terms “low residue diets” and “low fiber diets” used interchangeably, although they are similar, they are not exactly the same. In low fiber diets foods like dairy and coffee are allowed, be careful of that morning cup of java, that so many of us depend on, can actually increase the residue in the intestines and stimulate bowel movement, definitely not what you need during a diverticulitis flare up. It is important to check with your health care advisors on which diet plan they would like you to follow. Also when a person is on a low residue for an extended period of time the natural vitamin and mineral intake (such as vitamins C & D, folic acid, and calcium provided from fruits, vegetables, milk products) is lower so talk to your health care provider about which vitamin and mineral supplements they would recommend for you.

Once the symptoms of diverticulitis show improvement, it’s time to ease off of the diverticulitis
diet and gradually add more fiber back into your diet. The rule of thumb is to add 5 - 10 grams every few days, follow your bodies lead. That high fiber diet is once again important in preventing future diverticulitis attacks and keeps the intestinal system going; as is the morning cup of coffee for many of to just get the day going. As you increase your fiber intake, don’t forget to increase your fluid intake as well.

There are other medical situations that require the patient to start up on a low residue diet. These include: acute diverticulitis, pre and post intestinal or abdominal surgery, colonoscopy preparations, 1st & 2nd stage of labour, bowel inflammation, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, chemotherapy, radiation therapy to the lower bowel and pelvis areas, even astronauts (as per the space toilets request).

If you do have the need for a low residue diet follow the chart below for some suggested dos and don’ts.

Low Residue Diet Do’s:

- Refined pastas and noodles
- White breads, bagels, English muffins, buns
- White rice, Jasmine rice
- Fruit & vegetable juices free of pulp
- Plain Cereals: Rice Krispies, Special K, Cheerios, Cornflakes
- Ground or tender well cooked meat, poultry, fish, and eggs
- Butter, margarine, vegetable oils, dressings, and mayonnaise
- Very limited servings of well cooked vegetables that are peeled, deseeded and not pulp: alfalfa sprouts, beets, green/yellow beans, carrots, celery, cucumber, eggplant, lettuce, mushrooms, green/red peppers, squash, zucchini, potatoes with no skin
- Select fruits fresh or canned: applesauce, apricots, peaches, banana (1/2), cantaloupe, grapes, honeydew melon, watermelon
- Strained or pureed soups and broths from foods that are the “do” list
- Milk and seedless yogurt (usually limited to 2 cups per day), mild cheese, cottage cheese

it is very important to discuss with your doctor if your specific case can have milk products

Low Residue Diet Don’ts:

- Whole grain anything: breads, muffins, cornbread, pastas
- Bran, millet, buckwheat, oatmeal, flax, seeds, nuts,
- Yogurts with fruit skins or seeds, strong cheeses
- Dries peas, beans, lentils, legumes
- Tough and gristle meats
- Raw Fruits and berries with pulp or seeds, dried fruit
- Raw vegetables from the cruciferous family such as broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, Swiss chard etc
- Caffeine, chocolate, coconut (sorry to all coffee lovers, chocoholics, and soda fanatics)
- High spiced food, dressings, salsa, hot sauce
- Fruit or vegetable juices with pulp and prune juice
- Crunchy peanut butter
- Popcorn