

Gallstones – Treatment in Adults

A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

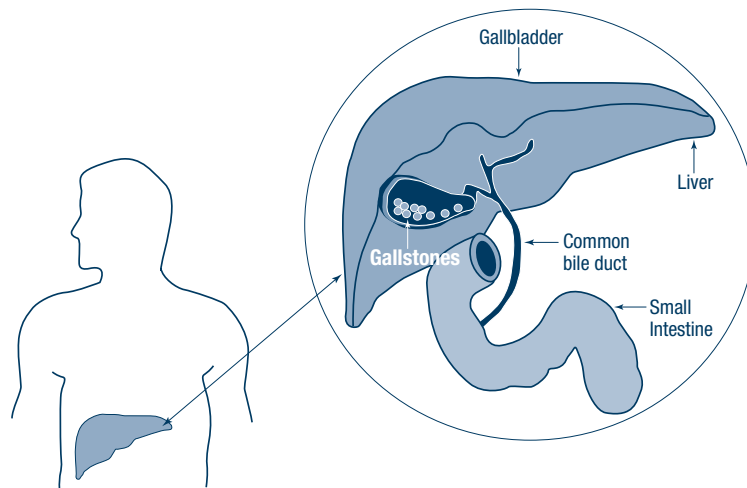
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What does the gallbladder do?

The gallbladder is a small, hollow organ located in the right side of the abdomen under the liver. The gallbladder stores and concentrates bile which is produced in the liver. Bile is used to digest and process food. When needed, the gallbladder releases bile through a small tube called a bile duct into the small intestine.

What are gallstones?

Gallstones form in the gallbladder. Most are composed of cholesterol and can vary in size and number. Most gallstones do not cause symptoms or problems. Sometimes gallstones will irritate the gallbladder or block the bile duct, causing pain.



What is the treatment for gallstones?

If your gallstones are not causing pain, treatment is not recommended. If you develop symptoms from your gallstones, consult your physician.

If you have mild infrequent symptoms from your gallstones, you may safely wait to see if your symptoms worsen. With more frequent or severe symptoms, you may wish to consider surgical removal of the gallbladder. Simply removing the stones without removing the gallbladder is not an adequate long-term treatment because of recurrence.

Surgical removal of the gallbladder is called cholecystectomy. Laparoscopic cholecystectomy is the removal of the gallbladder through a number of small incisions in the abdomen. The operation requires a general anaesthetic. Removal of your gallbladder should have little effect on your lifestyle or diet.

In rare cases when an individual cannot safely have surgery, non-surgical methods may be considered. However, gallstones commonly recur after non-surgical treatment.

As with all treatments, there are both benefits and risks. You should discuss your options with your doctor.

Resources

British Columbia Ministry of Health Web site:

www.BCGuidelines.ca

BCHealthguide Web site:

www.bchealthguide.org (search word: gallstones)

BC NurseLine:

- Toll-free in BC 1 866 215-4700
- In greater Vancouver 604 215-4700
- Deaf and hearing impaired 1 866 889-4700