

# Cholecystectomy and Exploration of the Bile Duct

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This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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## What are common bile-duct stones?

Common bile-duct stones are gallstones that move out of your gallbladder and get stuck in your common bile duct, which is a tube that connects your gallbladder to your intestines. Gallstones are 'stones' that form in your gallbladder. They are common and can run in families.

Your liver produces a fluid called bile that is concentrated by, and stored in, your gallbladder.

When you eat food, your gallbladder empties bile into your intestines to help digest fats. Stones can develop in bile, particularly if you eat a diet rich in fat.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

You should be free of pain and able to eat a normal diet. Surgery should also prevent the serious complications that common bile-duct stones can cause.

## Are there any alternatives to surgery?

An ERCP (endoscopic retrograde cholangio pancreatogram) is a procedure to examine your bile duct using a flexible telescope and dye (colourless contrast fluid).

It is possible to dissolve the stones or even shatter them into small pieces but these techniques involve unpleasant drugs that have side effects and a high failure rate.

Antibiotics can be used to treat any infection of your gallbladder and common bile duct. Eating a diet low in fat may help to prevent attacks of pain.

## What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes 1 to 2 hours.

Your surgeon will first need to find out where the stones are in your common bile duct.

If your surgeon finds any gallstones in the duct, they will try to remove them through the cystic duct using a wire basket, or by using a tube with an inflatable balloon at the end (balloon catheter).

Your surgeon will remove your gallbladder. They will free up and secure your gallbladder duct (cystic duct) and artery, separate your gallbladder from your liver, and remove it.

## What complications can happen?

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death.

### General complications of any operation

- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Developing a hernia in the scar
- Blood clot in your leg
- Blood clot in your lung
- Chest infection

### Specific complications of this operation

#### Keyhole surgery complications

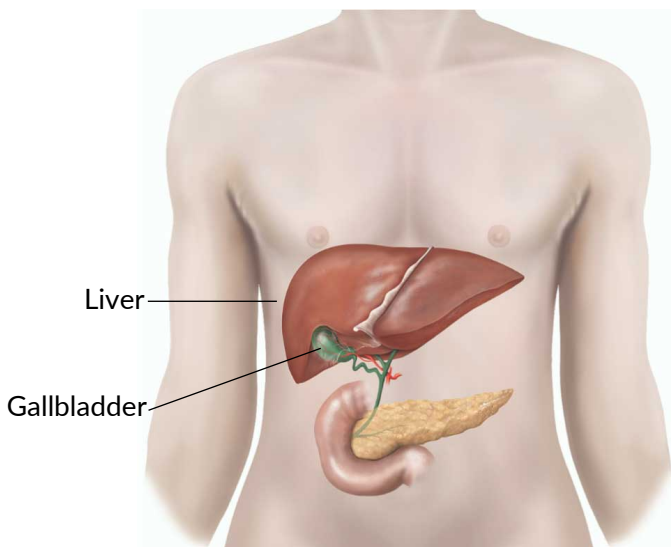
- Damage to structures such as your bowel, liver or blood vessels
- Developing a hernia near one of the cuts
- Surgical emphysema (a crackling sensation in your skin caused by trapped carbon dioxide)
- Gas embolism

#### Bile duct exploration complications

- Retained stones in your common bile duct
- Stones forming again in your common bile duct
- Narrowing of your common bile duct
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials, medication or dye
- Leaking of bile after the tube is removed
- Infection of your skin around the tube
- Difficulty removing the tube

#### Cholecystectomy complications

- Leaking of bile or stones
- Continued pain
- Needing to go to the toilet more often
- Inflammation of the lining of your abdomen
- Bowel injury
- Continued bowel paralysis (ileus), where your bowel stops working for more than a few days
- Serious damage to your liver or its associated blood vessels



The position of the gallbladder

- Tissues can join together in an abnormal way

### Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring of your skin

### How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home after 1 to 2 days if you had keyhole surgery or after 4 to 5 days if you had open surgery.

You should be able to return to work after 3 to 4 weeks, depending on how much surgery you need and your type of work.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

You should make a full recovery and be able to return to normal activities and eat a normal diet.

### Summary

Gallstones are a common problem. An operation to remove your gallbladder and any stones in your common bile duct should result in you being free of pain and able to eat a normal diet.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant healthcare team would give you.

#### Acknowledgements

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