

**Biliary/Gallbladder.** *What does the gallbladder do?* Your gallbladder is a storage tank for bile. Bile is made in the liver, stored in the gallbladder, and is squirted into the small intestine after a meal to help you digest fats.

*How do I know I have a problem?* Most people with gallbladder disease have pain. The pain is usually under the ribs on the right side, but can sometimes be felt in the middle of the upper abdomen, or right shoulder. The pain usually is worse after eating, especially if your meal was high in fat. Some people will also get nauseated and vomit when they have an episode of pain.

*What causes the problem?* Gallstones can sometimes block the flow of bile out of the gallbladder, which causes pain. Sometimes the gallbladder does not contract as well as it should and the bile does not drain—this can cause bile to back up and cause pain. Sometimes the gallbladder gets infected and becomes chronically inflamed.

*Do I have to have surgery?* If you have gallstones that get lodged in a bile duct and completely stop the bile flow, you will absolutely need surgery. A bile duct that is completely blocked by a stone can cause severe damage to your liver and pancreas—removal of the gallbladder may be life saving. Removing a chronically inflamed gallbladder usually results in decreased pain and improved quality of life. For a gallbladder that does not contract well, removal of the gallbladder does not always cure you completely, but often improves the pain you have after meals.

*How is surgery performed?* Removal of the gallbladder is called cholecystectomy. Most gallbladder surgeries today are done laparoscopically (with a camera). The camera is inserted into the belly button, and 3 or 4 small incisions are made in the abdomen to pass instruments through. The gallbladder is freed from the liver and removed whole through the belly button. If you have had many previous abdominal surgeries and have a lot of scarring, you may need to have an open procedure. This is done with a long incision under the ribs on the right side.

*How long will I be in the hospital?* You will usually stay for one night after the surgery for observation. When you are able to get up and walk around and eat a regular meal you will be sent home.

*What are the side effects of the surgery?* The most common complaint after gallbladder surgery is diarrhea. Since the gallbladder is no longer there to store bile until it is needed, bile constantly drips into the intestine and causes loose stool. Most people have diarrhea for a few days or weeks after surgery, but it then goes away on its own. If it does not go away, we can sometimes prescribe medicine that helps to absorb the extra bile and stop the diarrhea.

To make an appointment to discuss this topic, please call or email at the information listed below.

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