



Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy (Updated 10.08)

Cholecystectomy is surgery to remove the gallbladder. When it is done laparoscopically, the doctor inserts a laparoscope, or tiny camera, and other surgical tools through four or five small incisions in your abdomen. Typically there is less pain, quicker healing, and fewer complications than with an open cholecystectomy. However, sometimes the surgery must be converted to an open cholecystectomy, for your safety.

The main reason to remove the gallbladder is cholecystitis, or inflammation of the gallbladder. Some signs and symptoms of cholecystitis include:

- Severe abdominal pain or cramping after eating.
- Nausea, vomiting, and heartburn.
- Changes in bowel movements such as loose stool.
- Fever or chills.

Before surgery

If you and your doctor decide that surgery is the best option for you, there are some things you should know:

- A low-fat diet can reduce the frequency and severity of attacks.
- Tell your doctor about all medications you are taking, including vitamins, supplements, and blood thinners.
- Call your doctor if you experience a high fever or changes in your skin color (jaundice).
- Do not eat or drink anything after midnight the night before your surgery.
- Make sure that you have someone to give you a ride home from the hospital.

During the operation

- You will be put to sleep by the anesthesiologist before the procedure begins.
- A gas is used to inflate the belly and lift the abdominal wall away from the internal organs.
- Four incisions are made to allow a camera and the surgical instruments into the abdomen.
- Small clips are used to close the bile duct and blood vessels to the gallbladder. These clips are left inside, but are not harmful to the body.
- The gallbladder is detached from the liver bed and removed through the belly button incision.

- You will wake up in the operating room or in the recovery room where nurses will monitor you.
- After the recovery room, you will return to your family in the short stay unit.
- You will be required to stay a night in the hospital if your gallbladder is infected, if the surgery is done late at night, if you require a drain tube, or if you have other medical conditions that require monitoring as you recover from the surgery.

Caring for yourself after surgery

Pain: Pain is common after surgery, especially around the incision site. You may also experience abdominal pain from the gas used to inflate your belly. The pain medication prescribed by your doctor will help with this pain, which should improve in the days following your surgery.

Fever: A low-grade temperature is common after surgery. If your temperature exceeds 101.5 degrees or if it is accompanied by chills, vomiting, or flu-like symptoms, call the office.

Incision: When you leave the hospital, your incisions will be covered by a sterile bandage called a steri-strip. This will fall off or be removed when you have your post-op check. There may be some drainage from the incisions; this is normal. The drainage should be thin, watery, and slightly pink. It should not be bright red blood. Signs of an infection include thick green or yellow drainage, or skin around the incision that is red or warm to touch. Some swelling and bruising around the incisions is normal and should improve in the days following your surgery.

Constipation: Constipation is very common following a surgery. The anesthetic used during the operation paralyzes the bowel, which can lead to constipation for up to a week. Pain medications such as Vicodin or Percocet also cause the bowel to move more slowly. You may try over-the-counter medications such as milk of magnesia, Colace, or Metamucil, as well as prune or apple juice to get your bowels moving.

Diarrhea: Loose stool, or diarrhea, is a common side effect when the gallbladder is removed and typically occurs right after eating. Diarrhea should resolve in the weeks following the surgery, but can take 6 to 12 months in some people. Diarrhea is not a concern unless it is accompanied by fever, severe abdominal cramping, or if blood is present in the stool. Of course, you can lose a lot of fluid through diarrhea, thus it is important to stay well hydrated if you experience diarrhea after your operation. If the diarrhea is interfering with your daily activities, it may be safe for you to take an over-the-counter anti-diarrhea medicine. Check with your doctor first.

When to call the office

- Fever over 101.5 degrees.
- Persistent, increasing pain.
- Increased redness or drainage from an incision.
- Change in skin color/jaundice.
- Pain or swelling in your calf.
- Difficulty breathing.

When to go the Emergency Room

- Uncontrolled bleeding from the incisions
- Persistent vomiting
- Change in mental status
- Inability to breath

Frequently asked questions

Q: When can I take a shower?

A: Your incisions are covered with steri-strips. It is O.K. to take a shower the day after your surgery and you may get the steri-strips wet, just do not scrub them with soap. Do not soak in the bathtub or get into pools or hot tubs for 4 to 6 weeks following your surgery to prevent infection.

Q: When can I drive?

A: We want you to be safe on the road so you must be off of narcotic pain medications such as Vicodin or Percocet. You must also be able to put a seat belt on without pain or irritation to the incisions.

Q: Do I have any dietary restrictions?

A: It may take a few days for your appetite to return to normal after your surgery. There are no specific restrictions after a cholecystectomy, but keep in mind that foods high in fat may cause diarrhea.

Q: Do I have any activity restrictions?

A: You may return to your normal activities as soon as you feel able. For some people, this is the following day. Others may take several weeks to completely gain their strength.

Q: I'm still in pain after taking the prescription pain medication. What can I do?

A: The prescription medication contains a narcotic along with Tylenol (acetaminophen). If you are allowed to take ibuprofen, you may be able to take some between your doses of prescription pain medication. It is important for you to follow the directions on the label. If you have any questions or are not sure if you should be taking ibuprofen due to other medications or medical conditions, please check with your doctor first. You may also try ice packs and resting to alleviate the pain.

You are always welcome to call the office with your questions or concerns. After hours, an answering service will direct your questions to the on-call providers. However, these individuals are unable to call in prescriptions for pain medication after 5 p.m.