

EMERGENCY
Gallbladder
SURGERY

P A T I E N T G U I D E

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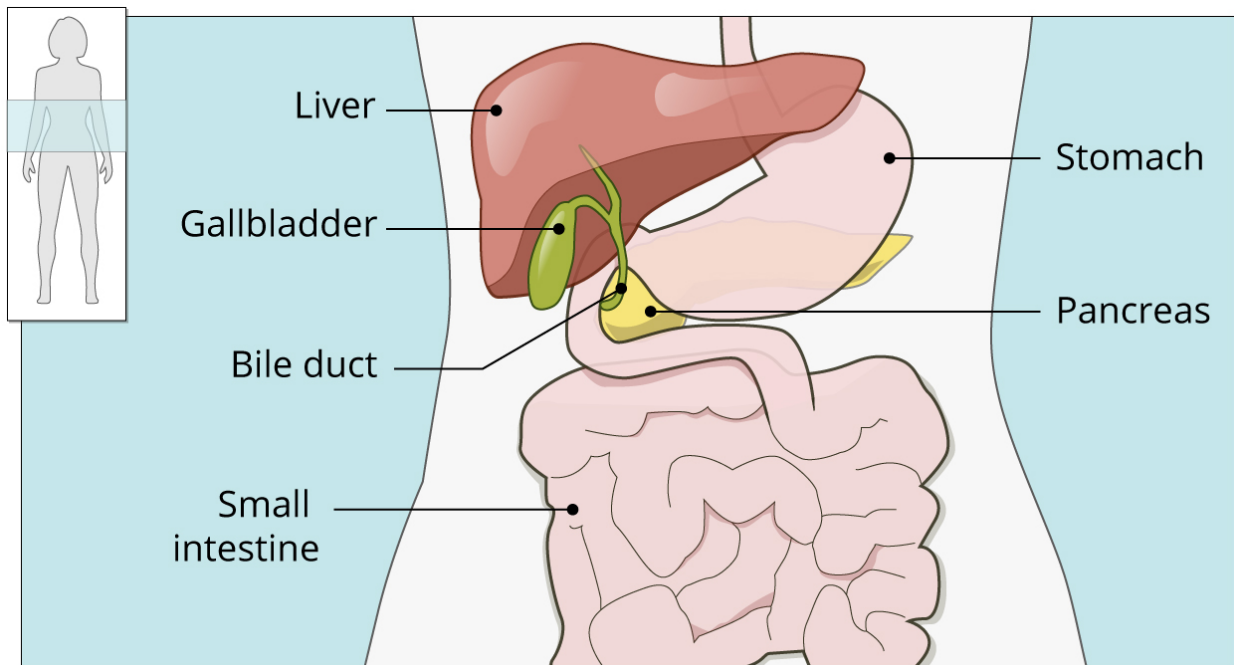
Enhanced Recovery After Surgery Program



CHRISTUS[®]
ST. MICHAEL
Health System

Recovering After Emergency Gallbladder Surgery

Emergency surgery is stressful. And while you couldn't plan for it, knowing what to expect and what to do at home will help you ask better questions and give you a sense of control. To understand what happened, take a look at the belly area.

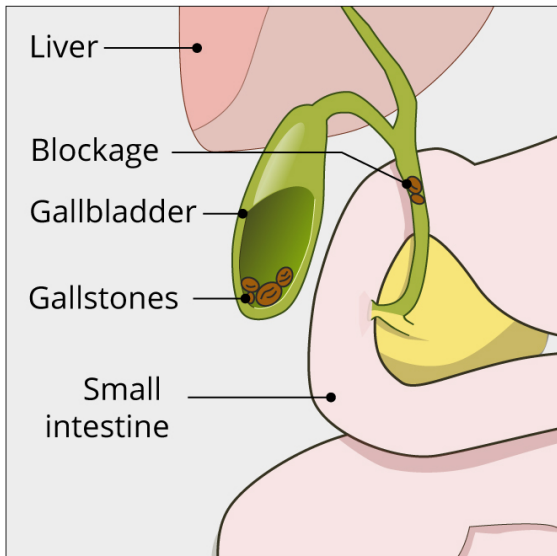


Food starts to get broken down in your **stomach**. Next, food moves into the **small intestine**, where it gets broken down more.

A fluid called **bile** helps break down fatty foods. Bile is made by your **liver** and stored in the **gallbladder**. Your **pancreas** [PAN kree us] also makes fluids to help break down sugars, proteins, and fats in food.

When you eat, bile flows to the first part of the small intestine through a small tube called the **bile duct**, where it joins the fluids made by the pancreas.

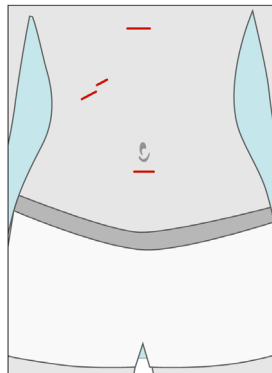
Gallstones and Gallbladder Attacks



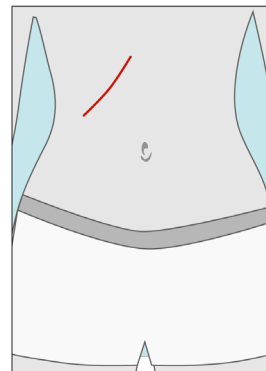
Something called **gallstones** can form and block the bile duct. They can be small like a grain of rice or as big as a golf ball. They can cause gallbladder attacks and serious infections.

With gallbladder attacks, people often have indigestion, pain in their belly or shoulders, a fever, throw up, and the whites of their eyes may turn yellow. Some of these problems can be life threatening. This is why surgery is needed to remove the gallbladder.

The gallbladder is often removed through small openings in the belly.



Sometimes a larger opening needs to be made instead.



Can you live without a gallbladder?

Yes. The liver still makes bile. Since the body can't store bile in the gallbladder, it sends it straight to the small intestine to break down fats. It may take time for your body to adjust. You may feel bloated or have gas or diarrhea for a few weeks or months.



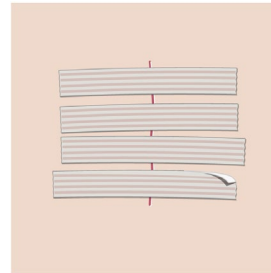
Eat small meals and drink water. At first, avoid fatty foods. Then slowly start to eat them again. If your body doesn't return to normal, let your doctor know.

Caring for Your Surgical Wounds

There may be small strips of medical tape (Steri-Strips™) or surgical glue on the wounds.

Do NOT pick at any surgical tape or glue. Over time, these will come off on their own.

If you have surgical staples, these will be removed at your follow-up appointment.



Showering



- Gently wash the wound with soap and water.
- Use a clean towel to gently pat the area dry.
- **Do NOT sit in water** (like a bathtub or hot tub).
- **And do not go in a pool, lake, or ocean** until your doctor says it's OK.

Water can get into the wounds and cause new infections.

Pain Relief

For most people, acetaminophen (Tylenol™) and ibuprofen (Advil®) are strong enough to manage any pain.



Opioid [OH-pee-oid] **pain medications**

These are strong medications like morphine, oxycodone (Oxycontin®, Percocet®), Vicodin®, Norco®, Dilaudid®, and others.

Only take opioids if you really need them because:

- They can be addictive.
- They can cause constipation.
- They can make you feel sick to your stomach.

For your safety and the safety of others, do NOT drive, swim, operate machines, watch children, or drink alcohol when taking opioids.

Activity, Work and School



- Walk as much as you can.
- It's OK to go up and down stairs.

Ask your doctor when it's OK to do anything that could cause strain like:

- Lifting anything heavy (like a big bag of groceries or a child)
- Activities like: vacuuming, lawn work, laundry, sports, or sex

Ask when you can drive or go back to work or school.

It depends on your job and how your surgery went.



- Ask your employer if there are any rules about when you can return to work.
- If you need a return-to-work form or short-term disability papers, we can help you fill these out before you go home.

When to Call



Call us if you are worried or have a question.

Call **RIGHT AWAY**:

- If you have a fever of **101.5 F degrees or higher**
- If you get the chills or you're sweating a lot
- If you feel sick to your stomach or you throw up
- If you have any new pain or if your pain is **worse**
- If fluid or pus comes out of your surgical wound
- If the area around any surgical wounds becomes red
- If you can't urinate (pee) or can't empty your bladder

Call early if you think something is wrong. Don't wait!

Call 911 or go to the Emergency Room:



- If you have chest pain
- If you are short of breath or have trouble breathing
- If you have any other severe problems

Have the emergency team call us once you are stable.



You can tear this sheet out and put it on your refrigerator.



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