

# Gallbladder Cancer: Risk Factors



## What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. Risk factors for a certain type of cancer might include smoking, diet, family history, or many other things. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known. But risk factors can make it more likely for a person to have cancer.

Things you should know about risk factors for cancer:

- Risk factors can increase a person's risk, but they don't always cause the disease.
- Some people with one or more risk factors never get cancer. Other people have cancer and have no risk factors.
- Some risk factors are very well known. But there's ongoing research about risk factors for many types of cancer.

Some risk factors such as family history may not be in your control. But others might be things you can change. Knowing about cancer risk factors can help you make choices that might help lower your risk. For example, if an unhealthy diet is a risk factor, you may choose to eat healthy foods. If being overweight is a risk factor, your healthcare provider may help you lose weight.

## Who is at risk for gallbladder cancer?

Risk factors for gallbladder cancer include:

- **Gallstones.** This is the most common risk factor. At least 3 out of 4 people with gallbladder cancer also have or had gallstones and an inflamed gallbladder. Gallstones are very common, but very few people with gallstones develop gallbladder cancer.
- **Porcelain gallbladder.** This is when the wall of the gallbladder becomes hard from calcium build-up. This changes how the gallbladder looks on X-rays. This condition can be linked with long-term (chronic) inflammation of the gallbladder (cholecystitis) from gallstones.
- **Being female.** Gallbladder cancer occurs more than twice as often in women as in men in the U.S.
- **Being an older adult.** Gallbladder cancer occurs more often in people older than age 65. But it can be found in younger people.
- **Ethnicity.** In the U.S., Hispanics of Mexican descent and Native Americans have the highest rates of gallbladder cancer. They are also more likely to have gallstones. African Americans have the lowest rate.
- **Obesity.** Studies have shown a link between gallbladder cancer and obesity. This may be because obesity also increases the risk of gallstones.
- **Gallbladder polyps.** Polyps are growths in the gallbladder wall. Polyps bigger than 1 centimeter (about 1/2 inch) are more likely to be cancer.
- **Bile duct abnormalities.** Bile ducts are tubes that carry bile from the liver and gallbladder through the pancreas to the small intestine. Bile is a liquid used by the body to break down fats in foods that you eat. Abnormal bile ducts may slow the flow of bile from the gallbladder. Or they may let pancreatic juices back up into the gallbladder. This seems to increase the risk of gallbladder cancer. Cysts along the bile duct can also increase risk.
- **Primary sclerosing cholangitis.** This disease causes inflammation and scarring in the bile ducts and increases the risk of gallbladder cancer.

- **Chronic typhoid or paratyphoid infection.** If you have been regularly exposed to these infections, you have a higher risk of gallbladder cancer. Typhoid is very rare in the U.S.
- **Family history.** A family history of gallbladder cancer seems to raise a person's risk. But most people with gallbladder cancer do not have a family history of the disease.

## What are your risk factors?

There are no routine tests to screen for gallbladder cancer. It's a rare disease often confused with other more common gallbladder problems. It's often hard to see the gallbladder with an ultrasound or CT scan. This makes it hard to find the cancer early, when it's small and before it has spread. Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for gallbladder cancer and what you can do to help reduce your risk.

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