

Recovering from gallbladder removal (Cholecystectomy)

How to recover from gallbladder removal

You can usually go home on the same day as having your gallbladder removed. But some people may need to stay in hospital overnight.

To make sure you have a good recovery, it's important to manage your pain and look after your wounds. You may be given medicines to help with the pain.

Before you leave hospital, a member of your care team will check to make sure you're ready to leave.

You'll be told if you need a follow-up appointment to have your stitches removed. Some types of stitches dissolve over time and do not need to be removed.

Recovering at home

After having your gallbladder removed, there are some things you can do to help with your recovery when you leave hospital and when you get home.

Do

ask a friend or relative to drive you home from the hospital

ask a friend or relative to stay with you for the first 24 hours to look after you

take painkillers to help ease the pain – your wounds will be painful for a few days

eat a normal, healthy diet – you may find it easier to eat small meals for the first few days

start doing some light activity but build up gradually and avoid strenuous exercise

follow the advice given by your care team about caring for your wound – you may be able to remove your dressing a few days after surgery

Don't

do not drive until you're able to do an emergency stop without any pain or discomfort – check your insurance policy to see if there are any rules about driving after surgery

Going back to work

You may be able to return to work 1 to 2 weeks after having your gallbladder removed, depending on the type of work you do and the type of surgery you've had.

If your job involves heavy lifting or standing for long periods, you might not be able to go back to work as soon.

Possible complications of gallbladder removal

Gallbladder removal (cholecystectomy) is a common and safe procedure.

But as with any operation there are risks, including:

- [blood clots or DVT](#) – to reduce the risk your doctor might suggest wearing compression stockings or taking [anticoagulant medicines](#)
- your wounds getting infected – the risk of infection is small and if it does happen it will usually be treated with antibiotics
- damage to internal organs or bile ducts (small tubes that connect the gallbladder to the liver) – the chance of this happening is small but if it does you may need further surgery
- bile leaking into your tummy – this is rare but if it happens you'll need another operation to drain the bile from your tummy
- gallstones left in your bile ducts or tummy – the chance of this happening is small but if it does you may have problems, such as pain and yellowing of the skin and whites of your eyes ([jaundice](#)), and you may need further treatment

Your chance of having problems depends on your age and general health.

Your doctor will explain the risks to you in more detail.

Symptoms after gallbladder removal

After having your gallbladder removed, symptoms you may have include:

- feeling sick (nausea)
- being sick (vomiting)
- indigestion
- tummy pain
- diarrhoea

This is sometimes called post-cholecystectomy syndrome.

These symptoms usually improve soon after the operation, but contact your GP or care team if you continue to have them. You may need some tests and be given medicines to help.

What happens after a cholecystectomy?

In the hospital

After the procedure, you will be taken to the recovery room to be watched. Your recovery process will depend on the type of surgery and the type of anesthesia you had. Once your blood pressure, pulse, and breathing are stable and you are awake and alert, you will be taken to your hospital room.

A laparoscopic cholecystectomy may be done on an outpatient basis. In this case, you may be discharged home from the recovery room. You will get pain medicine as needed. A nurse may give it to you. Or you may give it to yourself through a device connected to your IV line.

You may have a thin plastic tube that goes through your nose into your stomach. This is to remove air that you swallow. The tube will be taken out when your bowels are working normally. You won't be able to eat or drink until the tube is removed. You may have one or more drains in the incision if an open procedure was done. The drains will be removed in a day or so. You might be discharged with the drain still in and covered with a dressing. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for taking care of it.

You will be asked to get out of bed a few hours after a laparoscopic procedure or by the next day after an open procedure. Depending on your situation, you may be given liquids to drink a few hours after surgery. You will slowly be able to eat more solid foods as tolerated. You should schedule a follow-up visit with your healthcare provider. This is usually 2 to 3 weeks after surgery.

At home

Once you are home, it's important to keep the incision clean and dry. Your healthcare provider will give you specific bathing instructions. If stitches or surgical staples are used, they will be removed during a follow-up office visit. If adhesive strips are used, they should be kept dry and usually will fall off within a few days. The incision and your abdominal muscles may ache, especially after long periods of standing. If you had a laparoscopic surgery, you may feel pain, such as shoulder pain, from any carbon dioxide gas still in your belly. This pain may last for a few days. It should feel a bit better each day.

Take a pain reliever as recommended by your healthcare provider. Aspirin or other pain medicines may raise your risk of bleeding. Be sure to take only medicines your healthcare provider has approved.

Walking and limited movement are generally fine. But you should avoid strenuous activity. Your healthcare provider will tell you when you can return to work, or when pediatric patients can return to school, and go back to normal activities.

Call your healthcare provider if you have any of the following:

Fever or chills

Redness, swelling, bleeding, or other drainage from the incision site

More pain around the incision site

Yellowing of your skin or the whites of your eyes (jaundice)

Belly or abdominal pain, cramping, or swelling

No bowel movement or gas for 3 days

Pain behind your breastbone