

HEALTH BULLETIN

January 2013

GALLBLADDER HEALTH FACTS

American Indians are at a higher risk than other race/ethnic groups for gallbladder-related health problems.

The gallbladder is a small, pear-shaped organ that is located below the liver. The liver and the gallbladder are behind the right lower ribs. The gallbladder stores bile, a fluid made by the liver to digest fat. As food is digested, the gallbladder releases bile to help breakdown fat.

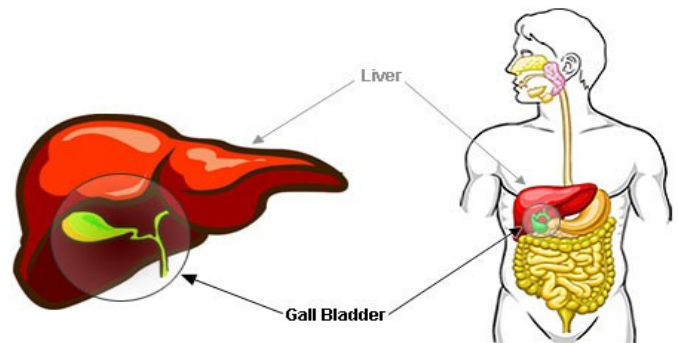


Image courtesy of www.home-remedies-for-you.com

Figure 1. Location of gallbladder.

GALLSTONES

Gallstones are hard, rock-like, crystal formations of cholesterol & other substances that form in the gallbladder. There are 2 types of gallstones: pigment (bilirubin) and cholesterol. About 80 percent of gallstones are cholesterol gallstones. Signs of gallstones may include: nausea, vomiting, or pain in the upper right abdomen, back, or under the right shoulder.

Factors that may increase your risk of gallstones include:

- Female gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Increased estrogen levels
- People over 60 years old

PORCELAIN GALLBLADDER

Porcelain gallbladder is a rare condition in which the wall of the gallbladder becomes covered with calcium deposits. The term porcelain gallbladder (PG) is used to describe bluish discoloration of the gallbladder.

Factors that may increase your risk of porcelain gallbladder include:

- Female gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Increased estrogen levels

GALLBLADDER CANCER

Gallbladder cancer starts in the gallbladder. It is not usually found until it is in its advanced stages because that is when symptoms appear. Symptoms may include: jaundice, pain above the stomach, fever, nausea and vomiting, bloating, and/or lumps in the abdomen.

Factors that may increase your risk of gallbladder cancer include:

- Gallstones
- Female gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Obesity
- Older age
- Geography
- Family history
- Porcelain gallbladder
- Choledochal cysts

PREVENTION

Maintain a healthy weight by exercising and eating a diet low in animal fat may. Lower your risk for gallbladder problems by including the following in your diet:

- Fats: monounsaturated fats (olive oil, canola oil) or omega 3 fatty acids (found in canola, flaxseed, and fish oil)
- Fiber
- Nuts
- Fruits and vegetables

TREATMENT FOR GALLSTONES

Gallstones found during an ultrasound or computerized tomography (CT) scan, that do not cause symptoms, usually do not require treatment. However, if symptoms occur such as pain in your upper right abdomen, treatment may be necessary.

There are two ways to medically treat gallstones. One method is to take medications that dissolve gallstones. Although this method is easier, it could take months or years for the gallstones to dissolve. This method is usually reserved for those who cannot undergo surgery. Cholecystectomy, or surgery to remove the gallbladder, is the other treatment method for gallstones. A person does not need their gallbladder to live and removal of the gallbladder does not affect the ability for the body to digest food.

DID YOU KNOW...

Most
gallbladder
stones do not
show
symptoms.

TREATMENT FOR GALLBLADDER CANCER

Treatment depends on the stage of the cancer in the gallbladder and whether the cancer has spread.

Cholecystectomy, or surgery to remove the gallbladder, may be an option if the cancer is in its early stages and is confined to the gallbladder. If the cancer extends into the liver, the gallbladder along with a portion of the liver and the surrounding bile ducts are surgically removed.

For late stage gallbladder cancer, chemotherapy and radiation therapy may be used to relieve symptoms of the cancer to make the patient more comfortable. For advanced gallbladder cancer that causes blockage in the bile ducts, a stent may be placed in the duct to hold it open or the bile ducts may be surgically rerouted to go around the blockage.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Please discuss any further concerns or questions with your health care provider.

Mayo Clinic Website:
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/DiseasesIndex/DiseasesIndex/METHOD=displayAlphaList&LISTTYPE=mcDisease&LETTER=g>

MedlinePlus Website:
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/healthtopics_g.html



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