

# Making a decision about gallstones

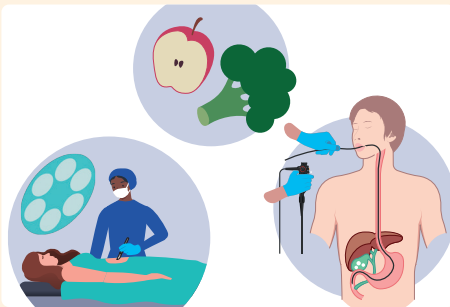
This leaflet is about **gallstones**.

It is split into sections. You do not have to read it all at the same time. Read it with your carer or doctor or nurse or someone you trust.



It will help you decide about **treatment**.

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There are different things you can do if you have **gallstones**.

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You can make a decision yourself about treatment.

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Or you can make a decision with your carer or doctor or nurse.

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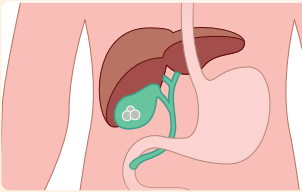


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## What are gallstones and how did I get them?



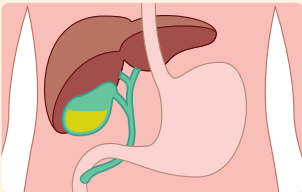
Gallstones are made in your **gallbladder**. They are made from **bile**.

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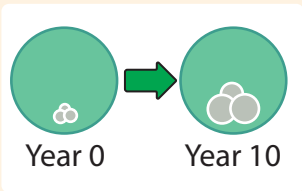
**Bile** is a liquid that your body makes. It helps digest fatty food like fried food.

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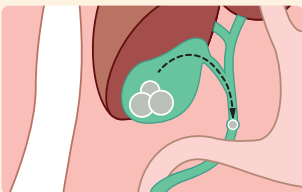
Your **gallbladder** is part of your body. It is near your stomach. It is a bag that stores bile.

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**Gallstones** can take many years to form. They can stay in your gallbladder and never cause problems.

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Sometimes gallstones move from the gallbladder and get stuck in the tube going from your gallbladder to your stomach. This tube is called the **bile duct**.

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Sometimes they move and get stuck somewhere else. If this happens they can cause you pain.



**Gallstones do not always cause pain.**

You can have them and not have any pain at all.

**Sometimes gallstones can be uncomfortable or painful.**



**You feel bloated or uncomfortable** especially on the right side of your tummy (abdomen).



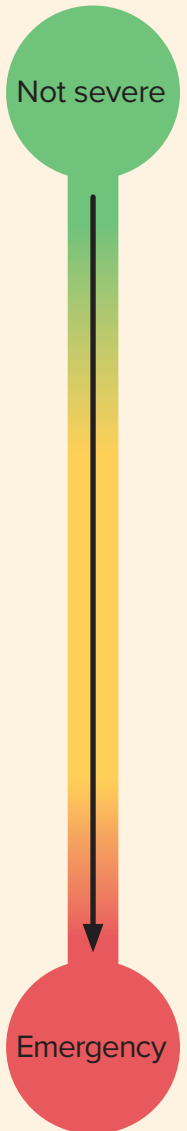
**You have a strong sudden pain in your tummy (abdomen)** Sometimes this pain is also in your shoulder or back.

- It might happen after you eat.
- It might feel like it comes in waves, strong then less strong.
- It can last for 30 minutes or even longer.



**If you feel pain and also have fever or jaundice,** you need to see a doctor urgently. You should call 111 or go to the hospital.

- Fever is where you have a high temperature.
- Jaundice is where your skin and eyes look yellow.





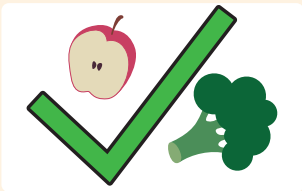
If you have any pain from gallstones you should see your doctor.



**Your doctor might ask if they can examine you.** They will ask you to lie down and will feel your tummy with their hand.

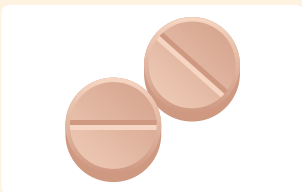


Your doctor might ask to do a **blood test**.



**Your doctor might suggest changing your diet.** This will not get rid of gallstones but it might help with pain. They might suggest that you:

- eat more fruit and vegetables.
- try not to eat many fatty food like crisps, chocolate, chips and other fried food.



Your doctor might suggest **medicines** for when you get pain.



If your **pain is really bad**, your doctor might send you to the **hospital** to see a specialist.

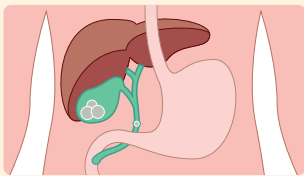
A specialist is a doctor who knows more about conditions like gallstones. They usually work in a hospital.



What might happen at the hospital if you see a specialist.

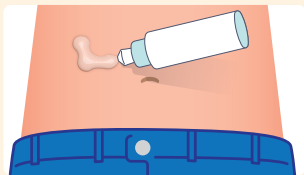


The specialist might ask if they can do a test called an ultrasound scan.



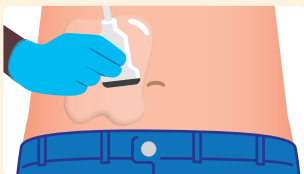
This is so that they can see **where your gallstones are** and **how many** you have.

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You lie down on a bed, and the specialist will put some **cold jelly** on your tummy.

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They use a device to spread the gel on your tummy. It will not hurt.

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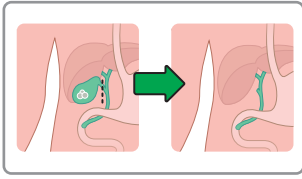
They can see **inside your body on a screen with this device.**

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This is so they know **which operation** to offer you.

You can read about 2 different operations on the next pages.



**1** If your gallstones are in your gallbladder, you can have an operation to remove your **gallbladder and gallstones**.

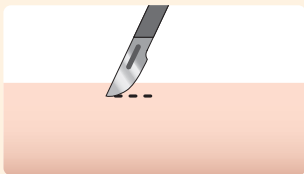
**Remember you can say no to any operation. It's your choice.**



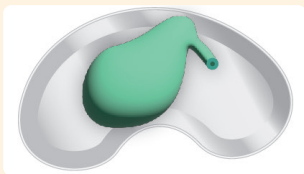
The operation takes about **1 hour**.



You will be **asleep during the operation**, you will have a special medicine that will make you sleep and you will not feel any pain.



When you are asleep your doctor will make some **small cuts** in your tummy.



They will take **out your gallbladder** with the gallstones inside. If they can not take it out through the small cuts they will make a **bigger cut**.



When the gallbladder is out your doctor will **sew up the cuts with stitches**.



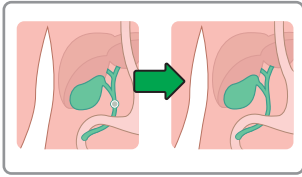
After the operation your doctor may give you **medicine or injections to help with pain**.



The operation can **stop the pain coming back**.

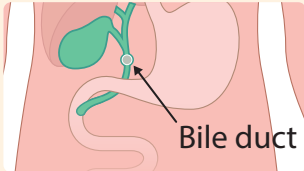


Sometimes things go wrong. These are called **complications**. You can read about complications on page 10.



**2** If your gallstones are in your bile duct, you can have a procedure called ERCP to remove them.

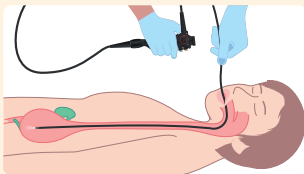
Remember you can say no to any help or procedure. It's your choice.



Gallstones sometimes move out of the gallbladder into the tube that connects it to the stomach. This is called the **bile duct**.



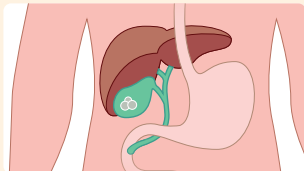
Your doctor will give you medicine to make you **sleepy**.



You will lie down and they will put a **very thin tube down your throat** and **remove your stones** through this tube.



Your gallbladder is **not taken out**.

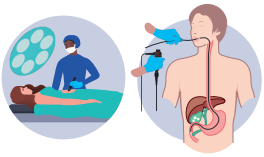


Any stones in your gallbladder **will stay there**.



You will be offered an operation to **remove your gallbladder later on**.

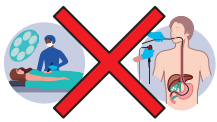




This section (page 7 and 8) helps you compare treatments. This page shows **how well each treatment works**.



Will my **pain** go away?

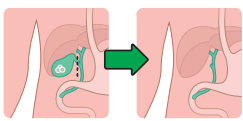


People who had no treatment at all



5.5 still have pain

4.5 have no pain



People who had the gallbladder removed



0.5 has bad pain

3 have little pain

6.5 have no pain



Sometimes people still have pain **even if their gallbladder and gallstones have been removed**.

This might be because the pain was caused by something else, not gallstones.



**If this happens to you, see your doctor. They can look for another reason for your pain.**



This page shows **side effects and complications**.

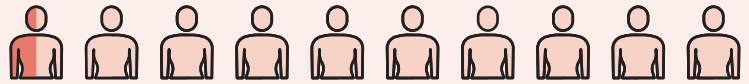


If I have an operation to remove my gallbladder, will I have **complications** or **loose poo**?

A side effect or complication is something that happens that you don't want. They can happen when you have a treatment or operation or if you take a medicine. They can be harmful.



### Complications

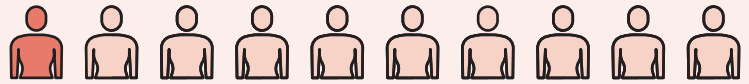


**0.5** gets a complication such as an infection

**9.5** do not



### Loose poo (diarrhoea) that continues for a long time after the operation.



**1** gets loose poo

**9** do not

If this happens to you, talk to your doctor. They can give you a medicine to help with diarrhoea (loose poo).



### It is your choice.

You can decide if you want to have an operation or not. You can decide if you want to take medicines.

Answer the questions on this page. And share it with your doctor or nurse or specialist.

It can help you think about what you want to do.

What would you like **help** with?



Pain



Sleep



Diet



Your mood



Physical activity



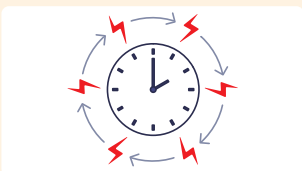
How **strong is the pain** when you get it? Circle on the scale how bad your pain is.



No pain

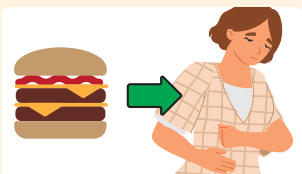


Pain so severe I can't think clearly



How often do you get pain or attacks of pain?

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Does any particular food make you have more pain?

.....



What do you do when you get pain?

.....



## You do not have to make a decision straight away



You can take **as long as you like** to decide.

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You can **talk to someone** about how you feel.

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It is always **your choice**. You should not feel pressured into anything you do not want to do.

You can write in this space. You could write down any questions you have. Your doctor, nurse or carer can write down what will happen next.

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## Gallstones

Are hard stones that are made from the liquid bile. They can be very small like grains of sand, or bigger, like marbles. They are usually in your gallbladder.

## Bile

Bile is a fluid that your body makes. It mixes with food that you eat. This helps your body digest, or use, the food you eat.

## Gallbladder

It is a part of the body. It is inside the body, you can't see it. Its job is to store a fluid that your body makes called bile.

## Complication

Something that happens if you take a medicine, have an operation or a treatment, that you didn't want.

## Ultrasound

A scan, or device, that is put on your body and your doctor can see a picture of your insides. A bit like an x-ray.

## ERCP

A bendy tube is put down your throat to your stomach. Your doctor can remove gallstones through this tube. ERCP stands for Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography

## Treatment

Something you do, or take like a medicine, or an operation, that can help with an illness, disease or condition.

## Bile duct

This is the tube that goes from your gallbladder into your intestines (gut)

## Specialist

A doctor who is specialised in one specific area of medicine.

## Jaundice

A condition where the whites of your eyes and skin can look yellow.

## Fever

When the temperature of your body is higher than normal. Your doctor or carer can check your temperature with a thermometer.



## Information about gallstones

Find out how long waiting times are for surgery in your area

### **My planned care**

<https://www.myplannedcare.nhs.uk>

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Information on nutrition and eating to avoid gallstone pain

### **Patient information**

<https://patient.info/news-and-features/gallstones-diet-sheet>

### **NHS Eat Well Guide**

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>

### **NHS Being a healthy weight**

<https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/lose-weight/>

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## **Patient Support Groups and Charities**

### **Guts UK**

<https://gutscharity.org.uk/advice-and-information/conditions/gallstones/>

### **British Liver Trust – Gallstones page**

<https://britishlivertrust.org.uk/information-and-support/liver-conditions/gallstones/>

### **Royal College of Anaesthetists - Information about general anaesthetic**

<https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/patients/patient-information-resources/anaesthesia-risk/risk-explained>

### **British Liver Trust – Gallstones page**

<https://www.easyhealth.org.uk/>

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Funding NHS England

This EasyRead decision aid was created with input from easy readers and clinicians

For declarations of conflicts of interest, to see other decision support tools, or to find out more about how this one was created and where we got our numbers from, go to:

[www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/shared-decision-making/decision-support-tools/](http://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/shared-decision-making/decision-support-tools/)