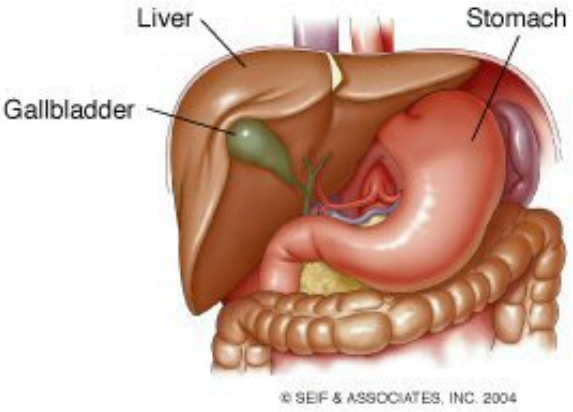
Cholelithiasis, Gallbladder Disease
(Gallstones)

Gallstones are a form of gallbladder disease. When there is an infection of the gallbladder it is called cholecystitis. It is usually caused by a build-up of stones (gallstones or *cholelithiasis*) in your gallbladder. The gallbladder is not an essential organ. This means it is not necessary for life. It is located slightly to the right of center in the belly *(abdomen*), behind the liver. It stores bile made in the liver. Bile aids in digestion and absorption of fats. Gallbladder disease may result in feeling sick to your stomach *(nausea*), abdominal pain, and jaundice. In severe cases, emergency surgery may be required.



Gallstones are the most common type of gallbladder disease. They begin as small crystals and slowly grow into stones. Gallstone pain occurs when the gallbladder spasms and a gallstone is blocking the duct. Pain can also occur when a stone passes out of the duct. The pain usually begins suddenly. It may persist from several minutes to several hours. Infection can occur. Infection can add to discomfort and severity of an acute attack. The pain may be made worse by breathing deeply or by being jarred. There may be fever and tenderness to the touch. In some cases, when gallstones do not move into the bile duct, people have no pain or symptoms. These are called “silent” gallstones.

Women are three times more likely to develop gallstones than men. Women who have had several pregnancies are more likely to have gallbladder disease. Physicians sometimes advise removing diseased gallbladders before future pregnancies. Other factors that increase the risk of gallbladder disease are obesity, diets heavy in fried foods and dairy products, increasing age, prolonged use of medications containing female hormones, and heredity.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Follow a low fat diet until seen again. (Fat causes the gallbladder to contract.)
- Follow-up as instructed. Attacks are almost always recurrent and surgery is usually required for permanent treatment.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Pain is increasing and is not controlled by medications.
- You have an oral temperature above 102º F (38.9º C), not controlled by medication, or as your caregiver suggests.
- You develop nausea and vomiting.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 02/13/2008 Document Re-Released: 11/30/2009
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.