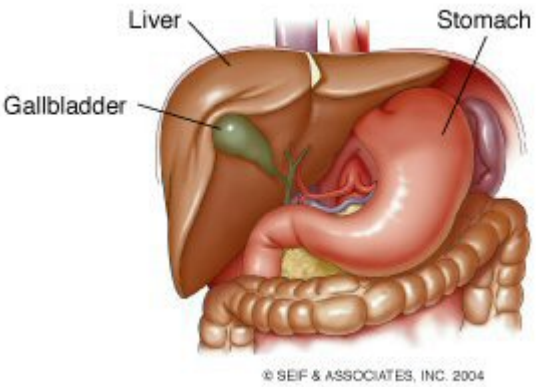
Gallbladder Disease
(Cholecystitis)

Gallbladder disease (*cholecystitis*) is an inflammation of your gallbladder. It is usually caused by a build-up of stones (*gallstones*) or sludge (*cholelithiasis*) in your gallbladder. The gallbladder is not an essential organ. 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 of fats. Gallbladder disease may result in *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach), abdominal pain, and jaundice. In severe cases, emergency surgery may be required.

The most common type of gallbladder disease is gallstones. They begin as small crystals and slowly grow into stones. Gallstone pain occurs when the bile duct has spasms. The spasms are caused by the stone passing out of the duct. The stone is trying to pass at the same time bile is passing into the small bowel for digestion. 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

- If your physician prescribed an antibiotic, take as directed.
- 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 not controlled by medications.
- The pain moves to another part of your abdomen or to your back. (Right sided pain can be appendicitis and left sided pain in adults can be diverticulitis).
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) develops, is not controlled by medication, or as your caregiver suggests.
- You develop nausea and vomiting.

Document Released: 04/07/2004 Document Re-Released: 06/05/2009
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