

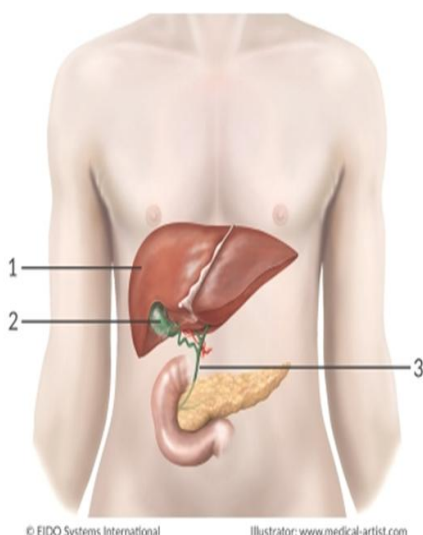
Gallstone management advice

Department of General Surgery

What is causing my symptoms?

Your tests have shown that your pain is caused by gallstones. Gallstones are 'stones' that form in your gallbladder, which is a small, pear-shaped organ that is tucked under the liver. It stores bile, a fluid that helps the body break down fat. Gallstones are very common and the risk of developing gallstones increases as you get older and if you eat a diet rich in fat. For some people gallstones can cause severe symptoms, with repeated attacks of abdominal pain being the most common. Pain is due either to stones blocking the gallbladder duct (common bile duct) and preventing your gallbladder from emptying (biliary colic), or to inflammation of your gallbladder (cholecystitis). The pain can be so severe that you need to be admitted to hospital. Pain from cholecystitis can last for days.

The position of the gallbladder



- 1. Liver
- 2. Gallbladder
- 3. Common bile duct

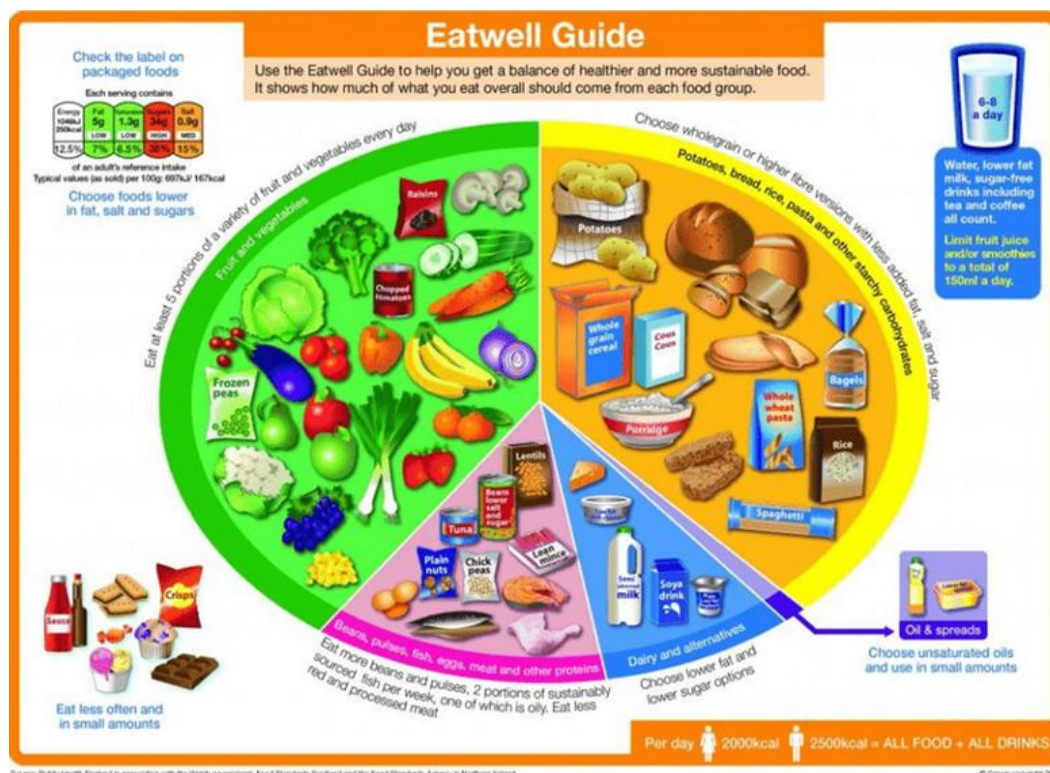
What problems can gallstones cause?

Cholecystitis can make you feel unwell. If the stones move out of your gallbladder into your common bile duct, they can cause jaundice (your eyes and skin turning yellow), serious infection of your bile ducts (cholangitis) or inflammation of your pancreas (acute pancreatitis). These problems can be serious and can even cause death.

Do I need to follow a special diet?

People are often told to follow a low-fat diet following a diagnosis of gallstones. This is because the dietary fat stimulates the gallbladder to contract, which in some individuals can trigger pain or other symptoms. However, gallbladder contraction also plays a protective role, as it helps reduce the build-up of stone-forming components within the gallbladder and bile ducts. Completely avoiding fat is therefore not recommended. In fact, fat is an essential component of a balanced diet and typically contributes around 30-35% of total energy intake.

Very low-fat diet or rapid weight loss can increase the risk of gallstone formation, while diets high in trans-fatty acids may also raise the likelihood of developing gallstones. For these reasons, people with gallbladder problems are advised to follow the principles of **Eatwell Guide (scan QR code below for more information)**, which promotes a balanced and sustainable diet.



https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5ba8a50540f0b605084c9501/Eatwell_Guide_booklet_2018v4.pdf
assets.publishing.service.gov.uk

Please see the table below for a summary of foods to **increase** and **reduce**, supporting gallbladder health:

INCREASE	REDUCE
Increase foods high in fibre such as • Fruits • Vegetables • Beans and peas • Whole grains – brown rice, whole wheat bread, and oats	Reduce foods high in saturated fat such as: -saturated fats such as • Fatty cuts of meat, including sausages and pies • Butter, ghee, and lard • Full-fat cheese (choose lower-fat varieties where possible). • Cream, soured cream and ice cream. • Chocolate confectionery • Biscuits, cakes, and pastries • Palm oil • Coconut oil and coconut cream
Eat healthy, choose unsaturated fats such as: - oily fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines). Olive oil and rapeseed oil. Avocados. Nuts (e.g., almonds and walnuts) and nut butters (if no Allergy). Lean cuts of meat, skinless chicken or turkey, and lower-fat mince. This will help your gallbladder contract and empty on a regular basis.	Reduce refined carbohydrates and foods high in added sugar. Limit sugary drinks.
Exercise to maintain a healthy weight. More help can be found here:  https://abuhb.nhs.wales/hospitals/staying-well-and-healthy/living-well/eating-well/getting-help-with-your-weight/	Reduce caffeine – can trigger painful gallbladder contractions.

Aim to drink two litres (six to eight glasses) of fluid (preferably water) a day – more if exercising or in hot weather.	Minimise alcohol intake. More support and information can be found here: https://www.gdas.wales/ 
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Additional dietary tips to help manage symptoms

- Try to eat regular meals, as missing meals and fasting reduces gall bladder emptying which increases the risk of stones forming or enlarging.
- If eating large meals causes you discomfort, try reducing your food portions and eat more frequently, this may reduce your symptoms.
- Eat breakfast soon after you wake up, as cholesterol concentrations are highest in bile produced overnight.
- Tips for eating less fat:
 - Try buying low fat versions of foods e.g., foods labelled as 'low fat', 'light' or 'diet'.
 - Check food labels and choose foods that contain less than 3g of total fat per 100g. These foods are labelled as green in the 'traffic light' system on the labels.
 - Try microwaving, steaming, poaching, boiling or grilling instead of roasting or frying.
 - Use oil and butter sparingly. Try using small amounts of oil sprays and low-fat spreads instead.
 - Take the skin and visible fat off meat/poultry before cooking.
- If you find there are other foods that trigger your symptoms, you could trial avoiding these to see if this helps.
- If you notice steatorrhea (pale, yellow, orange or oily stools which may float or be foul smelling) or losing weight unintentionally, struggling to eat because of gallbladder symptoms, or have concerns about your diet, please speak with your GP or healthcare professional. They may refer you to a dietitian for further advice.

When to get medical advice

If you develop any of the following symptoms, get immediate medical attention:

- jaundice
- abdominal pain lasting longer than 8 hours
- a high temperature and chills
- abdominal pain so intense that you can't find a position to relieve it

Contact your GP immediately, phone your local [out-of-hours service](#) or call [NHS 111](#).

How can gallstones be treated?

Painkillers can help control the pain; we recommend Paracetamol for pain relief and Ibuprofen to help reduce both pain and inflammation. Antibiotics are usually used to treat inflammation and any infection of your gallbladder. Eating a diet low in fat may help reduce attacks of pain. However, these measures will not cure the condition, and symptoms are likely to return. An operation to remove the gallbladder along with the gallstones (called a cholecystectomy) is the only dependable way to cure the condition. This option will be discussed with you by the surgical team in the clinic.

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes about an hour. Your surgeon will usually perform the operation using laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery. They will separate your gallbladder from your liver and remove your gallbladder. You should be free of pain and able to eat a normal diet. Surgery should also prevent the serious complications that gallstones can cause. Your body will function perfectly well without a gallbladder.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg”.**