

UG19lite Cholecystectomy and Exploration of the Bile Duct

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This document will give you information about a cholecystectomy and exploration of the bile duct. If you have any questions, you should ask your GP or other relevant health professional.

What are common bile-duct stones?

Common bile-duct stones are gallstones that get stuck in the common bile duct, which is a tube that connects the gallbladder to your intestines (see figure 1). The likelihood of developing gallstones increases with age and in people who eat a diet rich in fat.

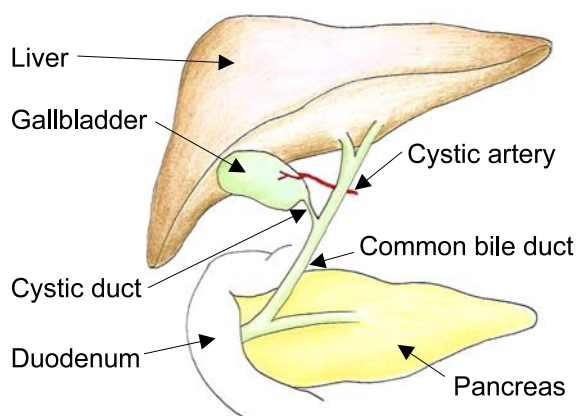


Figure 1

The gallbladder and surrounding structures

Common bile-duct stones can cause jaundice, severe infection of the bile duct or inflammation of the pancreas.

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should be free of pain and able to eat a normal diet. Surgery should also prevent the serious complications that common bile-duct stones can cause.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

An ERCP is a procedure that uses a flexible telescope to examine the bile duct and to remove stones by a sphincterotomy. A stent may also be inserted to relieve jaundice.

It is possible to dissolve the stones or even shatter them into small pieces but these techniques involve unpleasant drugs that have side effects and a high failure rate. The gallstones usually come back.

Antibiotics can be used to treat any infections of the gallbladder and common bile duct. A low-fat diet may help to prevent attacks of pain. However, these alternatives will not cure the condition.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes between one and two hours.

Your surgeon may use the laparoscopic ('keyhole') technique. Your surgeon will make several small cuts on your abdomen. They will place surgical instruments, along with a telescope, inside your abdomen and perform the operation.

Your surgeon will first look for and remove any stones from the common bile duct. To allow bile to drain out, your surgeon will usually place a T-shaped tube into the common bile duct, with one end coming out through your skin.

Your surgeon will then separate the gallbladder from the liver, and remove it.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Unsightly scarring
- Blood clots

2 Specific complications

- Damage to internal organs
- Developing a hernia near one of the cuts
- Surgical emphysema
- Retained stones
- Stones forming again
- Narrowing of the common bile duct
- Leaking of bile
- Persistent pain
- Diarrhoea
- Inflammation in the abdomen
- Bowel injury
- Serious damage to the liver

How soon will I recover?

You should be able to go home within a day or two.

Your surgeon will ask you to go to the clinic to have the T tube removed.

You should be able to return to work after three to four weeks depending on the extent of surgery and your type of work.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible.

Before you start exercising, you should ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice

You should make a full recovery and be able to eat a normal diet.

Summary

Gallstones can move into the common bile duct. An operation to remove your gallbladder and any stones in the common bile duct should result in you being free of pain and able to eat a normal diet. Surgery should also prevent the serious complications that common bile-duct stones can cause.

Acknowledgements

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This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.