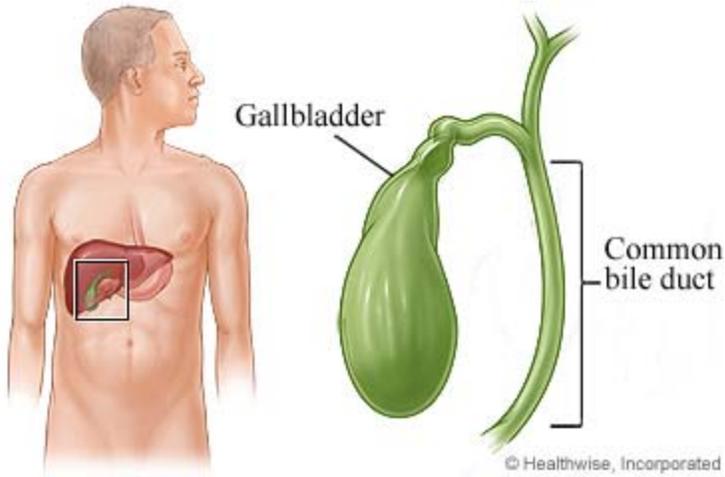


Learning About Gallstones

What are gallstones?



Gallstones are stones that form in the gallbladder. The gallbladder is a small sac located just under the liver. It stores bile released by the liver. Bile helps you digest fats. Gallstones can be smaller than a grain of sand or as large as a golf ball.

Gallstones form when cholesterol and other things found in bile make stones. They can also form if the gallbladder doesn't empty as it should.

Gallstones can also form in the common bile duct or cystic duct. These tubes carry bile from the gallbladder and the liver to the small intestine.

What happens when you have gallstones?

Gallstones can cause many different problems, such as:

- A blockage in the common bile duct.
- Inflammation or infection of the gallbladder (acute cholecystitis). This can happen when a gallstone blocks the cystic duct.
- Inflammation or infection of the common bile duct (cholangitis). This can happen when gallstones get stuck in the common bile duct. In rare cases, this can damage the liver or spread infection.
- Pancreatitis, an inflammation of the pancreas.

What are the symptoms?

- Most people who have gallstones don't have symptoms.
- Symptoms can include:
 - Mild pain in the pit of your stomach or in the upper right part of your belly. It may spread to your right upper back or shoulder blade area.
 - Severe pain that may come and go or be steady. It may get worse when you eat.
 - Fever and chills, if a gallstone is blocking a bile duct and causing an infection.
 - Yellowing of your skin and the whites of your eyes.

How can you prevent gallstones?

There is no sure way to prevent gallstones. But you can reduce your risk of forming gallstones that can cause symptoms.

- Stay at a healthy weight. If you need to lose weight, do so slowly and sensibly.
- Eat regular, balanced meals.
- Be active, and exercise regularly.

How are gallstones treated?

- If you don't have symptoms, you probably don't need treatment.
- For mild symptoms, your doctor may have you take pain medicine and wait to see if the pain goes away.
- For severe pain or infection, or if you have more than one gallstone attack, your doctor may suggest surgery to have your gallbladder removed. The body works fine without a gallbladder.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

Where can you learn more?

Go to www.southdenvergi.com, log into the web portal, and enter I524 in the search box to learn more about Learning About Gallstones.

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