

## Emergency Department Gallstones

### General Information

The gallbladder is a small, pear-shaped organ that is tucked under your liver. It stores bile, a fluid that helps the body break down fat. Gallstones are small stones that form inside the gallbladder; they can be tiny specks or get as big as the whole gallbladder. In most cases, gallstones do not cause any symptoms. Sometimes, though, gallstones clog the gallbladder and keep it from draining or just irritate the gallbladder.

Symptoms of gallstones are stomach pain (often on the right side just under the rib cage or in the middle top portion of the stomach), pain in the back or right shoulder, and nausea or vomiting. Gallstones are generally not serious. The symptoms can come and go, but they often get worse over time. Some people can control their gallstone symptoms with diet and lifestyle changes, while others require surgery to remove the gallbladder.

### Instructions

1. Eating a healthy balanced diet that is naturally low in fat may help to reduce symptoms. A healthy balanced diet consists of:
  - Plenty of fruit and vegetables. Aim to have at least five portions each day.
  - Plenty of starchy carbohydrates. Examples include bread, rice, cereals, pasta, potatoes, chapattis and plantain. Choose whole grain varieties when possible.
  - Some milk and dairy products (2-3 portions per day). Choose low-fat dairy products.
  - Some meat, fish, eggs and alternatives such as beans and legumes.
  - Limiting amounts of foods high in fats and sugars. Limit saturated fat that is found in animal products, such as butter, ghee, cheese, meat, cakes, biscuits and pastries. Replace these with unsaturated fats found in vegetable oils, such as sunflower, grapeseed and olive oil, avocados, nuts and seeds.
  - Making sure your diet is high in fibre. This can be found in beans, legumes, fruit and vegetables, oats, and whole-wheat products, such as bread, pasta and rice.
  - Drinking plenty of fluid - at least two litres daily, such as water or herbal teas.
2. Try not to eat too much fat at one mealtime. It might be helpful to have smaller, frequent meals. Some people find that specific foods are the triggers for symptoms. Keep a food and symptom diary to identify trigger foods. Avoid these foods for a two-week trial period and note any improvements in symptoms.
3. If you are overweight, losing weight will be beneficial. However, it is important to do this gradually, as rapid weight loss has been associated with the development of gallstones. A safe weight loss of 1-2 lbs (0.5 to 1 kg) per week is recommended.
4. Take pain medications as prescribed or recommended by your doctor.

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## **Return to Emergency if any of the following develop:**

- Constant, increasing abdominal pain.
- Unable to keep clear fluids down for more than 12 hours.
- Signs of dehydration, including excessive thirst, little or no urination, dizziness or light-headedness.
- Fever of 38.0°C (100.4°F) or more not relieved by acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil).

**For more information or questions contact HealthLinkBC at 811.**

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