

# Gallstone Surgery (Cholecystectomy)

## What Is A Cholecystectomy?

A cholecystectomy is a surgical procedure to remove the gallbladder, a small organ beneath the liver that stores bile. This surgery is often performed to treat complications caused by gallstones, which can block bile ducts and cause pain, infections, or inflammation. The gallbladder is not essential for digestion, and most people can lead a normal life without it.

## Why Is A Cholecystectomy Needed?

A cholecystectomy is usually recommended for patients with symptomatic gallstones. Gallstones can block bile ducts and cause severe pain, inflammation, and other complications. You may need this surgery if you experience:

- **Severe abdominal pain:** Typically, in the upper right abdomen, which may worsen after eating fatty foods.
- **Nausea and vomiting:** Commonly occurring alongside gallstone-related pain.
- **Jaundice:** Yellowing of the skin and eyes caused by blocked bile flow.
- **Repeated gallbladder infections:** Recurring episodes of gallbladder inflammation (**cholecystitis**) or infections in the bile ducts (**cholangitis**).

If these symptoms are affecting your quality of life, a cholecystectomy can help relieve discomfort and prevent future complications.

## Types Of Cholecystectomy

At Birmingham Liver Clinic, we offer two main types of cholecystectomy:

- **Laparoscopic cholecystectomy**  
This is the most common and minimally invasive procedure to remove the gallbladder. It involves making several small incisions in the abdomen through which a small camera and surgical instruments are inserted. The surgeon removes the gallbladder while viewing the area on a video monitor. Key benefits of laparoscopic cholecystectomy include:
  - **Faster recovery times:** Most patients can return home the same day or after a short hospital stay.
  - **Minimal scarring:** The small incisions result in minimal scarring and less post-

operative pain.

- **Shorter downtime:** Patients can typically resume normal activities within 1-2 weeks.

- **Open cholecystectomy**

In some cases, where laparoscopic surgery is not suitable, an open cholecystectomy may be performed. This procedure involves making a larger incision in the abdomen to remove the gallbladder. This option is typically used for patients with severe inflammation, scarring from previous surgeries, or complex anatomy. Recovery from an open cholecystectomy takes longer, usually involving a hospital stay of 3-5 days and a full recovery period of 4-6 weeks.

## The Procedure

A cholecystectomy is performed under general anaesthesia and typically takes about 1-2 hours. For a laparoscopic cholecystectomy, the surgeon makes 3-4 small incisions in the abdomen and inserts a laparoscope to view the gallbladder. Using specialised instruments, the gallbladder is carefully removed, and the incisions are closed with stitches or surgical glue.

In rare cases, if complications arise during the laparoscopic procedure, the surgeon may switch to an open cholecystectomy to complete the operation safely.

## Recovery After Cholecystectomy

Most patients who undergo laparoscopic cholecystectomy recover quickly and can resume normal activities within a week or two. Mild discomfort around the incision sites and shoulder pain (from the gas used during the procedure) are common but typically subside within a few days. Patients are encouraged to walk and move around soon after surgery to promote healing and prevent complications like blood clots.

For those who have an open cholecystectomy, recovery is longer. Patients are usually advised to avoid strenuous activities and heavy lifting for 4-6 weeks and may need additional time off work to recover fully.

## Life After Gallbladder Removal

After a cholecystectomy, the liver continues to produce bile for digestion, but it flows directly into the small intestine rather than being stored in the gallbladder. Most people can live a normal life without their gallbladder, though some may experience temporary digestive changes, such as difficulty digesting fatty foods. These changes usually resolve over time, and dietary adjustments can help minimise discomfort.

## Why Choose Birmingham Liver Clinic?

At Birmingham Liver Clinic, we provide expert, personalised care for patients needing gallbladder removal. Our experienced surgeons specialise in both laparoscopic and open cholecystectomy, offering the most appropriate treatment for your condition. We use advanced surgical techniques to ensure the best outcomes and a faster recovery for our patients.

Our clinic takes a patient-centred approach, ensuring that you receive tailored care every step of the way, from diagnosis to post-surgery recovery. Whether you need surgery for gallstones or other gallbladder-related issues, we are here to provide the highest quality care.

## Contact Us

If you are experiencing symptoms of gallstones or need advice on whether a cholecystectomy is right for you, contact Birmingham Liver Clinic today to schedule a consultation. Our expert team is here to guide you through the process and provide the care and support you need.