

Bile Duct Cancer

What Is Bile Duct Cancer?

Bile duct cancer, also known as cholangiocarcinoma, is a rare cancer that starts in the bile ducts. These ducts are thin tubes that carry bile (a digestive fluid produced by the liver) to the gallbladder and small intestine, where it helps digest fats. Bile duct cancer can be serious and grows quickly, which is why early diagnosis is important. It mainly affects people over 60 but can happen at any age.

Types Of Bile Duct Cancer

Bile duct cancer is classified based on where it starts:

- **Intrahepatic:** Starts in the smaller bile ducts inside the liver.
- **Perihilar** (also called Klatskin tumours): Found where the bile ducts exit the liver.
- **Distal:** Located in the bile ducts outside the liver, closer to the small intestine.

What Causes Bile Duct Cancer?

The exact cause of bile duct cancer isn't always known, but certain factors increase your risk:

- **Primary sclerosing cholangitis (PSC):** A liver condition that causes bile duct inflammation and scarring.
- **Liver disease:** Diseases like cirrhosis or hepatitis B and C increase the risk.
- **Bile duct stones:** Long-term irritation from stones can lead to cancer.
- **Liver fluke infections:** These parasites, found in certain regions, can cause cancer.
- **Age:** People over 60 are at higher risk.
- **Congenital bile duct issues:** Some people are born with problems in their bile ducts that can increase cancer risk.

Symptoms Of Bile Duct Cancer

Bile duct cancer often doesn't cause symptoms early on, which makes it hard to detect. As the cancer grows, you may experience:

- **Jaundice:** Yellowing of the skin and eyes due to bile build-up.
- **Itchy skin:** Caused by bile salts accumulating under the skin.
- **Dark urine and pale stools:** A sign of bile flow being blocked.
- **Abdominal pain:** Usually felt in the upper right side of the belly.
- **Weight loss:** Losing weight without trying.
- **Fatigue:** Feeling unusually tired.
- **Fever:** Sometimes associated with bile duct blockages.

If you notice any of these symptoms, it's important to see a doctor as soon as possible.

How Is Bile Duct Cancer Diagnosed?

At Birmingham Liver Clinic, we use several tests to diagnose bile duct cancer, including:

- **Blood tests:** To check how well your liver is working and detect any abnormalities.
- **Imaging tests:** These include ultrasound, CT scans, or MRI scans to get a clear picture of the bile ducts.
- **ERCP** (Endoscopic Retrograde Cholangiopancreatography): A special test where a flexible tube with a camera is inserted through the mouth to examine the bile ducts. A dye is injected to help see blockages.
- **Biopsy:** A small sample of tissue is taken from the bile ducts to check for cancer cells.

- **Cholangioscopy:** A procedure that allows doctors to look inside the bile ducts and collect tissue samples if needed.

Treatment Options For Bile Duct Cancer

The treatment of bile duct cancer depends on the size, location, and stage of the cancer. At Birmingham Liver Clinic, we offer a variety of treatments, including:

- **Surgery:** Surgery is the best option for early-stage bile duct cancer. The surgeon removes the tumour and nearby tissue. Sometimes, part of the liver or lymph nodes may also need to be removed. In certain cases, a liver transplant might be recommended.
- **Radiotherapy:** This uses high-energy radiation to kill cancer cells and is often used after surgery to reduce the risk of the cancer coming back.
- **Chemotherapy:** Chemotherapy uses drugs to kill cancer cells. It might be given before surgery to shrink the tumour or after surgery to eliminate any remaining cancer cells.
- **Palliative care:** If the cancer is advanced and surgery is not an option, palliative care focuses on managing symptoms and improving quality of life. This might involve procedures to relieve blockages in the bile ducts, such as inserting a stent.

Why Choose Birmingham Liver Clinic?

At Birmingham Liver Clinic, we provide expert, personalised care for people with bile duct cancer and other liver conditions. Our team of experienced hepatobiliary (HPB) surgeons and liver specialists uses advanced diagnostic tools and cutting-edge treatments to offer comprehensive care. With a multidisciplinary approach, we tailor treatment plans to each patient, ensuring you receive the highest quality care for your specific condition.

When you choose us, you will benefit from:

- **Specialist care:** Our doctors have extensive experience treating bile duct cancer.
- **Personalised treatment:** We design treatment plans based on your specific condition and needs.
- **Comprehensive support:** From diagnosis to treatment and follow-up care, we are with you every step of the way.

Contact Us

If you are concerned about bile duct cancer or would like more information, contact Birmingham Liver Clinic today. Our team of specialists is here to help.