

# Gallstones

***“Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.” Jeremiah 33:6***

Gallstones are common, especially in women. However, to understand gallstones, first we must discuss the gallbladder. Everyone has a gallbladder, which stores bile which is produced by the liver. Bile is squeezed out by the liver to help us digest the fat we eat during a meal.

Problems can occur when crystallization of substances in the bile form stones. They may cause an inflammation of the gallbladder which causes feelings of indigestion. This would commonly occur after a meal containing many fats. If a stone becomes stuck in the gallbladder duct, severe pain can occur. The stone may move along on its own, or it may require surgery.

Gallstones are most commonly seen in women, people over 40 years of age, and obese persons. Native Americans have a far higher incidence, as well as women who have been pregnant. Scientists have also discovered that genetics plays a role in who will develop gallstones. If those at risk can be identified, treatments to prevent gallstones could be used.

Symptoms of gallstones may include a sudden pain in the abdomen—either on the right side or in the middle. The pain may vary in how severe it is, but it will not go away until the stone moves on its own or is removed with surgery. The pain may spread to the shoulder or back, and nausea is common. This pain may happen within minutes of eating a meal.

The best test to diagnose gallstones is an ultrasound, which uses sound waves to see the shape and consistency of the gallbladder. Another test that may be used is a HIDA scan, where radioactive dye is injected into the blood stream allowing the doctor to see any blockages or leaks.

A person can have gallstones with no symptoms, so not all stones need treatment. For those that cause great pain or frequent stomach problems, surgery is the most common way to remove the stones. With the advancement of surgical techniques, most gallstones can be removed with a laparoscopic surgery. This requires only 4 small openings in the abdomen, and patients may go home the same day or the next morning.

Recognizing the symptoms of gallstones and seeking treatment when needed are the keys to maintaining good health.

More info: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov) and [www.medicinenet.com](http://www.medicinenet.com)

Blessings, Nurse Karen