

Gallbladder Removal Surgery (Cholecystectomy)

Information for patients, whanau and families

This information brochure is for patients that have been diagnosed with gallbladder problems or gallstones. It explains options for management or surgery. All our cholecystectomy procedures are performed at Kensington Hospital in Whangarei. If you cannot find the information in this brochure, please ask your specialist, or contact Kensington Hospital.

What is a Gallbladder?

The gallbladder sits just below the liver on the upper right side of the abdomen. It is a small, pear-shaped, pouch-like organ that stores and releases bile that helps your body break down food. If people have too much of a liver pigment called bilirubin in the bile or excess cholesterol, they may experience gallbladder problems or gallstones. Symptoms can include:

Sharp pain in your abdomen

Nausea and vomiting

Indigestion

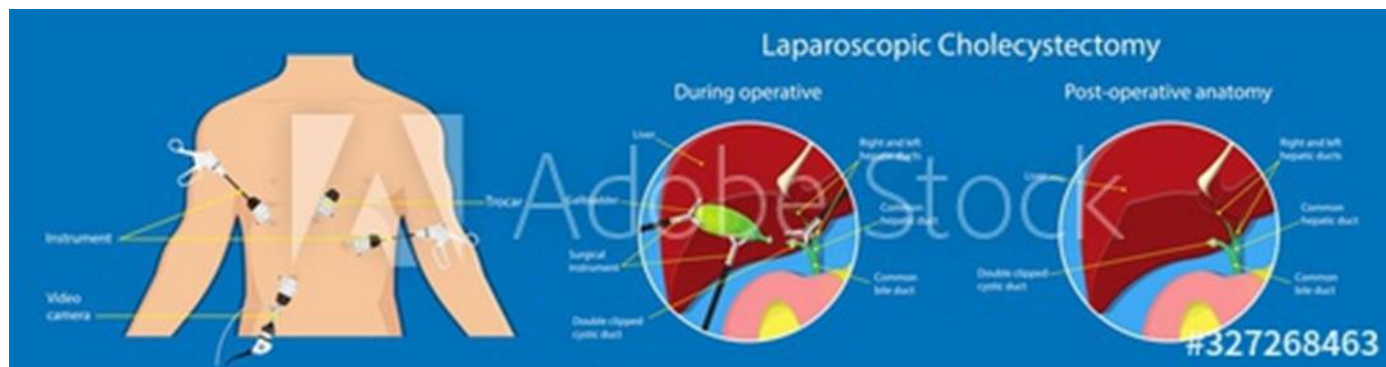
Fever

Jaundice - medical term for skin and eyes that look yellow. You might get jaundice if gallstones block your bile duct.

In cases where symptoms do not subside and become uncomfortable or interfere with everyday life, your specialist may suggest either an open or laparoscopic 'keyhole' cholecystectomy. Fortunately, you can live a healthy life without your gallbladder and the surgery to remove it is relatively simple.

Do I need cholecystectomy surgery?

If your gallbladder is causing you symptoms or limiting your activity, and other forms of treatment are not assisting, then surgery should be considered. If you have gallstones and they move and block ducts, the bile can back up and lead to inflammation, infection and disease of the gallbladder, liver or pancreas which can quickly become a surgical emergency.



Preparation for my cholecystectomy surgery

The procedure is performed under general anaesthesia sedation. If you have a laparoscopic cholecystectomy you can usually go home on the day of your surgery or the morning after, and someone should stay with you for at least 24 hours if you go home the day of your surgery. Open cholecystectomy takes one or two hours, and you can expect to spend two or three days in hospital recovering. In either case, you will need to arrange for someone to take you home from hospital.

If you are taking blood thinning medication such as Warfarin, Ticagrelor (Brilinta), Clopidogrel (Plavix), Dabigatran(Pradaxa) or oral iron tablets, please contact your specialist's rooms a week prior to your surgery as the medication may need to be stopped 3-5 days prior to your surgery. Please also refer to Kensington Hospital patient information booklet or their website for more preparation information.

Procedure Room

On the day of your surgery, your specialist will explain the procedure and you will be required to sign a consent form. This confirms that you understand the procedure and agree to go ahead. **Please ask any questions you may have.** It is important that you fully understand what is happening.

The procedure to remove the gallbladder is called a cholecystectomy and the most common method is 'keyhole surgery' or laparoscopic cholecystectomy. The procedure is performed by inserting a tiny video camera and special surgical tools through four small incisions to see inside your abdomen and remove the gallbladder (see diagram overleaf).

In some cases, one large incision may be used to remove the gallbladder. This is called an open cholecystectomy. During an open cholecystectomy, the specialist makes a 15 cm incision in your abdomen below your ribs on your right side. The muscle and tissue are pulled back to reveal your liver and gallbladder. Your specialist then removes the gallbladder.

Your specialist will discuss with you what type of surgery is recommended for you.

After the cholecystectomy surgery

After your surgery, you will return to the recovery area. A nurse or your specialist will discuss the result of the surgery and give you a written report. A report will also be sent to your GP with details of the surgery. Most people who have laparoscopic cholecystectomy surgery go home the day of surgery or the morning after, or two to three days after open cholecystectomy surgery. You will be required to attend a follow up appointment with your specialist and an appointment time will be emailed or posted to you.

If you develop any severe pain in the neck, chest, or abdomen within 24 hours after your surgery please contact Kensington Hospital (ph 09 4379080). Other key symptoms to watch out for are fever or chills, increasing pain or redness around the incision, jaundice, drainage from the incision site(s), or not passing a bowel movement for 2-3 days after surgery. If you get any of these, contact a doctor or your specialist straight away.

If you have a laparoscopy cholecystectomy it usually takes around 2 weeks to return to your normal activities. After open surgery, your recovery time will be longer, up to 6 to 8 weeks to return to your normal activities. While you can return to light activity as soon as you are able, be careful and sensible in the first 10-14 days. It is recommended to avoid lifting any heavy objects, pushing, straining, or undertake any strenuous exercise for six weeks following your surgery.

What are the risks of cholecystectomy surgery?

Most cholecystectomy surgeries are safe and uncomplicated. However, as with any surgical procedure there is a small chance of side effects or complications including breathing difficulties, bleeding, allergic reactions to anaesthesia or other medications and infection. Specifically, for gallbladder surgery, the possible risks are bile duct injury or leakage, you may experience prolonged pain at the site, there could be damage to blood vessels, nerve damage or damage to nearby organs. Please discuss any concerns with your specialist.

This brochure is intended to provide general advice only. It does not provide definitive medical advice. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your specialist via his rooms (ph 09 4373875), or Kensington Hospital (ph 09 4379080).