

Pediatric Cholecystectomy

A Guide for Patients & Parents

What is cholecystectomy?

Cholecystectomy is an operation to remove the gallbladder. The gallbladder is a small sac found just under the liver on the right side of the abdomen. The gallbladder stores a liquid called bile. Bile is made in the liver and released into the intestine with meals. Bile is important because it helps digest the fat in foods.

The gallbladder is not an essential organ and your child will do well after cholecystectomy. Once the gallbladder is removed, bile will continue to be released from the liver directly into the intestine with meals.

Why is cholecystectomy necessary?

The primary reason for cholecystectomy is gallstones and pain. Gallstones are small "rocks" of cholesterol, bilirubin and protein that form inside the gallbladder. Gallstones can block the release of bile out of the gallbladder. This blockage can cause pain and jaundice (yellow skin color). If your child has these problems, his or her primary care doctor or nurse may recommend a visit with a pediatric surgeon. Because gallstones can't be removed without taking out the gallbladder, both the stones and the gallbladder are during the operation.

How will a cholecystectomy be performed?

A large incision may not be required. In most cases, a cholecystectomy can be performed laparoscopically using a small telescope and tiny instruments placed through Band-Aid-sized incisions on the abdomen. The operation is usually completed in one to two hours. During hospitalization, your child will receive intravenous fluids, antibiotics and pain medication. As soon as your child feels well enough, he or she will be allowed to eat, drink and take pain medication by mouth, often as early as the evening of surgery.

How long will my child remain in the hospital after the operation?

Your child must be able to eat, drink and be comfortable on pain medication taken by mouth before going home. Most children are ready to go home one to two days after the operation.

How do I take care of my child at home following discharge from the hospital?

Pain: Prescription pain medication is not routinely required after hospital discharge. Most children only need Tylenol® or Motrin® once they are at home. Follow the dosage directions on the label. If your child is still uncomfortable, call our office and we may prescribe something stronger.

Dressings: Gauze and clear plastic tape placed over the incision(s) may be removed two days after surgery. There may be a small amount of blood on the pieces of tape on the wound called Steri-strips®. This is normal. Your child can bathe with the Steri-strips® in place. These can be removed one week after the operation. The skin surrounding the incision may be red and bruised, and the incision may be slightly swollen. This can last several weeks. There will be no visible stitches to remove because they are under the skin. These stitches will dissolve after several weeks.

Healing ridge: You will be able to feel a firm ridge just underneath the incision once it is healed. This is called a healing ridge and it is normal. The healing ridge usually lasts for several months before it softens and disappears.

Bathing: Your child may bathe or shower as soon as two days after surgery. Once your child is feeling better, either in the hospital or at home, he or she may bathe or shower without restriction.

Activity: There are no specific activity restrictions following surgery. If your child is school age, school activities can be resumed as soon as he or she feels well enough. If you need a letter sent to your child's school regarding the operation and recovery, please contact our office.

Do I see the surgeon again after the operation?

If all is going well, a visit to our office is not required. Our pediatric nurse practitioner will call you to check on your child's recovery. A visit to your child's specialist or primary care physician one to two weeks after discharge is recommended.

When do I call your office?

Call our office at (415) 476-2538 if:

- You have any concerns you have about your child's recovery
- Your child has a temperature of 101 degrees or higher
- The incision(s) is red
- There is severe pain and tenderness at the incision
- Any fluid is coming out of the incision(s)

This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace the advice of your physician or health care provider. We encourage you to discuss with your physician any questions and concerns you may have.