



# Cholecystitis

## Overview

Cholecystitis (ko-luh-sis-TIE-tis) is inflammation of the gallbladder. Your gallbladder is a small, pear-shaped organ on the right side of your abdomen, beneath your liver. The gallbladder holds a digestive fluid that's released into your small intestine (bile).

In most cases, gallstones blocking the tube leading out of your gallbladder cause cholecystitis. This results in a bile buildup that can cause inflammation. Other causes of cholecystitis include bile duct problems, tumors, serious illness and certain infections.

If left untreated, cholecystitis can lead to serious, sometimes life-threatening complications, such as a gallbladder rupture. Treatment for cholecystitis often involves gallbladder removal.

## Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of cholecystitis may include:

- Severe pain in your upper right or center abdomen
- Pain that spreads to your right shoulder or back
- Tenderness over your abdomen when it's touched
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever

Cholecystitis signs and symptoms often occur after a meal, particularly a large or fatty one.

## When to see a doctor

Make an appointment with your doctor if you have worrisome signs or symptoms. If your abdominal pain is so severe that you can't sit still or get comfortable, have someone drive you to the emergency room.

## Causes

Cholecystitis occurs when your gallbladder becomes inflamed. Gallbladder inflammation can be caused by:

- **Gallstones.** Most often, cholecystitis is the result of hard particles that develop in your gallbladder (gallstones). Gallstones can block the tube (cystic duct) through which bile flows when it leaves the gallbladder. Bile builds up, causing inflammation.
- **Tumor.** A tumor may prevent bile from draining out of your gallbladder properly, causing bile buildup that can lead to cholecystitis.
- **Bile duct blockage.** Kinking or scarring of the bile ducts can cause blockages that lead to cholecystitis.
- **Infection.** AIDS and certain viral infections can trigger gallbladder inflammation.
- **Blood vessel problems.** A very severe illness can damage blood vessels and decrease blood flow to the gallbladder, leading to cholecystitis.

## Risk factors

Having gallstones is the main risk factor for developing cholecystitis.

## Complications

Cholecystitis can lead to a number of serious complications, including:

- **Infection within the gallbladder.** If bile builds up within your gallbladder, causing cholecystitis, the bile may become infected.
- **Death of gallbladder tissue.** Untreated cholecystitis can cause tissue in the gallbladder to die (gangrene). It's the most common complication, especially among older people, those who wait to get treatment, and those with diabetes. This can lead to a tear in the gallbladder, or it may cause your gallbladder to burst.
- **Torn gallbladder.** A tear (perforation) in your gallbladder may result from gallbladder swelling, infection or death of tissue.

## Prevention

You can reduce your risk of cholecystitis by taking the following steps to prevent gallstones:

1. **Lose weight slowly.** Rapid weight loss can increase the risk of gallstones. If you need to lose weight, aim to lose 1 or 2 pounds (0.5 to about 1 kilogram) a week.
2. **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight makes you more likely to develop gallstones. To achieve a healthy weight, reduce calories and increase your physical activity. Maintain a healthy weight by continuing to eat well and exercise.
3. **Choose a healthy diet.** Diets high in fat and low in fiber may increase the risk of gallstones. To lower your risk, choose a diet high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

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