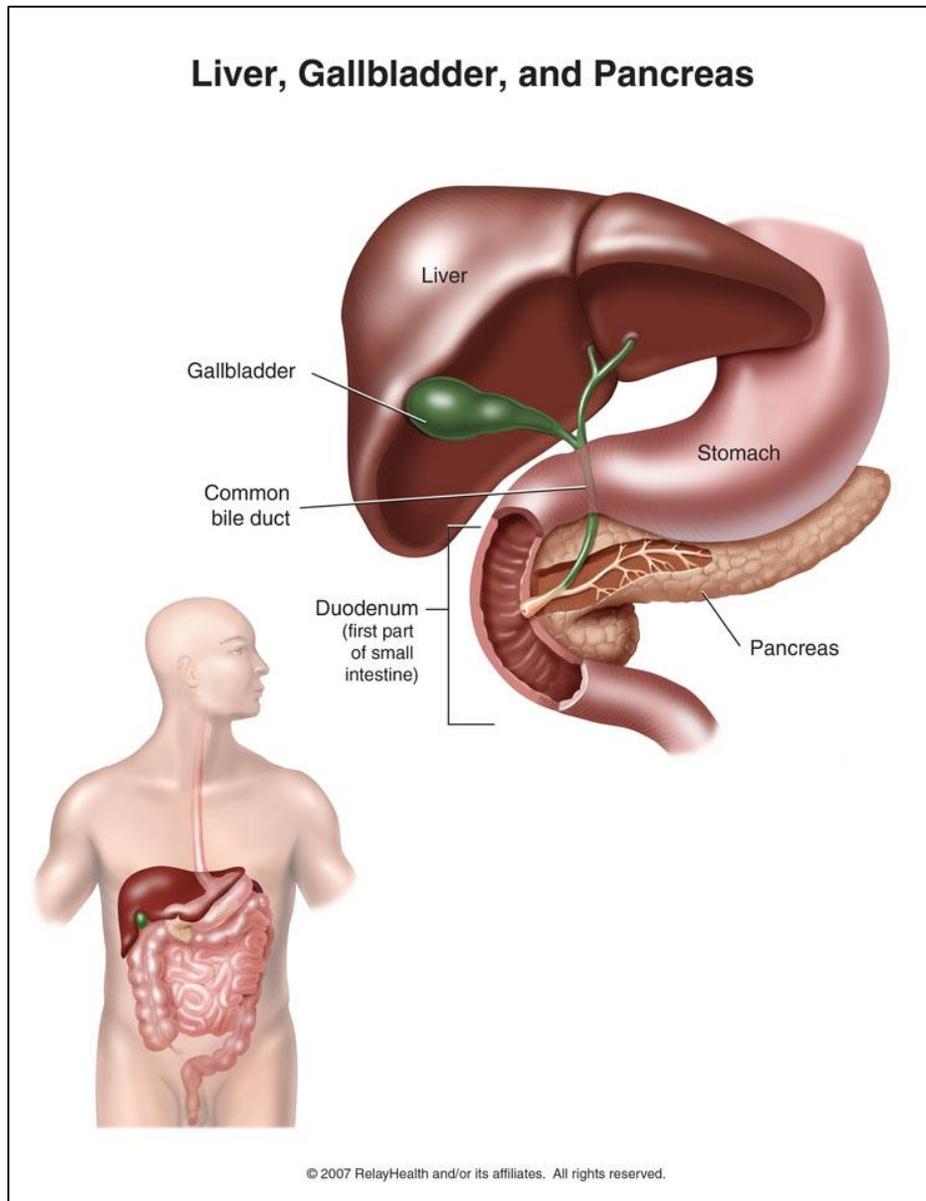


Gallbladder Cancer

What is gallbladder cancer?

Gallbladder cancer is rare but it is the most common type of cancer of the bile tract. When abnormal cells grow uncontrollably, they are called cancers.

The digestive tract (mouth, esophagus, stomach, large intestine, and small intestine) plus the liver, gallbladder, and pancreas make up the digestive system. The gallbladder, which is linked to the liver and small intestine, stores bile. After you eat, your gallbladder empties bile into the intestine to help you break down your food, especially fats.



What is the cause?

The cause of gallbladder cancer is not known. Most people who have gallbladder cancer also have gallstones. However, even if you have gallstones, the risk of getting cancer is very low.

Cancer in the gallbladder can spread to the liver and block the flow of bile, which causes many of the symptoms of gallbladder cancer.

What are the symptoms?

There may be no symptoms. When there are symptoms, they may include:

- loss of appetite
- unexplained weight loss
- nausea
- vomiting
- pain or discomfort in the upper right side of the abdomen
- jaundice (a yellow coloring of the skin and whites of the eyes caused by bile building up in the body)
- itching of the skin

How is it diagnosed?

During a physical exam, your healthcare provider may be able to feel a lump in the upper right part of your abdomen, just below the ribs. You may have special X-ray exams and a blood test. However, gallbladder cancer is difficult to diagnose. Gallbladder cancer may be found unexpectedly during surgery to remove gallstones.

How is it treated?

If the tumor is only in the lining of the gallbladder, you need surgery to remove the gallbladder, the part of the liver touched by the gallbladder, and nearby lymph nodes. The surgery gives a chance for cure and can lessen symptoms.

If the tumor is more advanced and cannot be removed with surgery, possible treatments are:

- surgery to relieve obstruction
- chemotherapy (anticancer drugs)
- radiation

You may be given the option to choose treatment designed just to relieve symptoms. This would allow you to avoid symptoms caused by chemotherapy.

How long will the effects last?

If you have a tumor that is only in the lining of the gallbladder, you have a good chance of cure if your gallbladder is removed. If your cancer was large enough to involve the liver or local lymph nodes, then the chance of cure is lower and depends on the success of the radical resection.

If the cancer has spread, your chances of recovery are far less. Spread, also called metastasis, means that cells from the tumor in your gallbladder have traveled through the bloodstream and lymphatic system and have started to grow new tumors in other places in your body. If your cancer has spread, talk to your healthcare provider about your chances for cure.

How can I take care of myself?

Talk to your healthcare provider about any concerns you have about your illness and treatments. Ask about side effects you may have from treatments. You may want to make a list of questions at home and take it with you when you visit your provider. Ask a friend to go with you who can listen, too. If you don't understand something, ask your provider to explain it. Take notes if you need to.

It is important to eat a balanced diet, get plenty of rest, and follow the advice of your healthcare provider. It is helpful to lessen stress in your life and take time to relax.

For more information, contact:

- American Cancer Society, Inc.
800-ACS-2345 (800-227-2345)
<http://www.cancer.org>
- AMC Cancer Research Center and Foundation
800-525-3777
<http://www.amc.org>
- Cancer Information Service
800-4-CANCER (800-422-6237)
<http://www.cancer.gov/aboutnci/cis>

What can be done to help prevent gallbladder cancer?

Since gallbladder cancer is a rare cancer of unknown cause, there is no known way to prevent it.

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This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.

[References](#)

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