



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Gallstones

Gallstones can often cause painful and debilitating symptoms, but understanding your condition is the first step to taking control of it. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Gallbladder	A small organ located near the liver which mainly functions to store bile.
Bile	A fluid that is produced in the liver and secreted by the gallbladder. Bile is yellow green in color and serves to aid in the digestive process.
Bile Ducts	Tubes that carry bile from the liver or gallbladder into the small intestine.
Bilirubin	A substance created when the liver breaks down red blood cells. Bilirubin is bright yellow in color and is also the same substance that causes jaundice.
Cholecystitis	The medical term for inflammation of the gallbladder. This usually occurs when gallstones block the bile ducts.
Cholecystectomy	The surgical removal of the gallbladder. This is necessary in some cases to cure symptomatic gallstones, bile duct blockages or other gallbladder problems.
Gallbladder attack	The onset of symptoms that occurs when gallstones block the bile duct. Symptoms may include: nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, back pain, shoulder pain, or pain between your shoulder blades.
Hepatobiliary Iminodiacetic Acid (HIDA) Scan	A medical imaging test that specifically looks at the function of the gallbladder, liver, and small intestine. This is accomplished by injecting a small amount of radioactive material into your blood stream and then tracking that substance as it moves through these organs. This is an excellent test for showing bile duct blockages.



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your gallstones.

About Symptoms

- Can having gallstones cause symptoms even if the stones are not blocking the flow of bile?
- I understand that if my bile duct becomes blocked this could lead to serious complications. What symptoms would indicate this has occurred? At what point should I seek medical attention?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- Do you know what caused me to develop gallstones and are other family members including my children also at risk?
- Is there anything I can do to mitigate the risk of developing a bile duct blockage such as changing my diet or discontinuing any of my medications?

About Diagnosis

- Can you review the medical imaging tests (ultrasounds, CT scans, etc.) that showed I have gallstones with me?
- Is further testing (such as a HIDA scan or blood testing) necessary at this time to determine if my gallstones are causing any blockage of the bile ducts?

About Treatment

- Can dietary changes be used as a treatment for gallstones?
- At what point does surgery (cholecystectomy) become necessary?
- What are the risks of a cholecystectomy?
- What is the average recovery time of a cholecystectomy?
