

## What Is A Gallbladder?

I would like to introduce you to a very close friend. Someone who has been with you since birth - hangs around with you all the time, but 73% of all people have no clue what it really is for. I'm speaking of course, of your gallbladder. In fact, when I had my serious gallbladder attack 2-3 weeks back, and the ER doctor said it was my gallbladder causing all that pain, my first response was..."My what? What does that do?"

For those of you not in the know, the short, 6th grade health class version is:

Your liver produces bile, which is used to digest fats. After the liver produces it, it travels to the gallbladder where it is stored and released in small amounts as needed. The problem comes if you eat too much fatty foods, and your gallbladder starts to produce gallstones...they can be extremely small, or grow to be huge. There can be only one, or many of them. But when they occur, they can block the bile from being released, or be lodged in the bile duct from the gallbladder to the stomach.

Now for the real life version:

You start feeling small amounts of pain in your back and stomach. You also have severe heartburn and a crushing pain under your ribs that feels suspiciously like you are having a heart attack. You may also get irregular stools, and excessive burping. Diarrhea and cramps become a weekly or daily thing. Over time (which can be months or years) the pain gets worse, and worse and worse. This pain is caused by the blockage of bile release from your gallbladder. The gallbladder itself can become inflamed from this blockage. Sometimes (if you are lucky), the pain is only temporary, because smaller stones that might get lodged may eventually pass through you. However if you have a lot of stones, or big stones, it just gets worse and worse. The pain is strong, intense and not very much fun.

Some people may go through their lives with gallstones and not even know it, because they don't actually block anything. And then there are those of us that get to experience the delightful experience known as a gallbladder attack. I had the symptoms mentioned above for about 3-4 years before I had my first (and only!) gallbladder attack. It happened about 2-3 weeks ago, and let me describe it thus: I have had a child. I have been in Naval Boot Camp. I have broken both of my legs, cut my little toe half off, and have had piercings in various parts of my body. This was the WORST PAIN I have EVER felt.

Nowadays, they have a different type of surgery they can use to remove your gallbladder. They used to have to cut you straight open and you would be left with a 5-day hospital stay and a huge scar to show for it. Now they generally use laparoscopic surgery to make 5 small incisions in your stomach. They use a tiny camera, small instruments, and a light to locate your gallbladder, sever it carefully, and then remove it through your bellybutton. This type of surgery has a lot less recovery time, fewer complications, and is much more comfortable for the patient.

Of course, some people debate whether to have your gallbladder removed at all. Everyone reacts differently to having his or her gallbladder removed, and it is a bit of a game of Russian roulette. Some people may recover from surgery and feel better than ever, while some may still have pain, severe diarrhea, and other discomfort. However, it is your own body, and only you can decide what is best for it. There are medications that very slowly dissolve gallstones, but this is not a cure, as the gallstones will keep recurring no matter what you do. The only currently effective way to rid you of gallstones is to remove your gallbladder.

Overall, a gallbladder attack is not a fun thing to have happen. People of any age, any race, and in any state of health can get gallstones, although studies have shown that Native Americans are most pre-disposed to having gallstones, as well as elderly people and those who eat high-fat diets. A good way to prevent gallstones from occurring is to eat less fat in your diet and to eat healthy foods.

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### About the Author

Stephanie Davies is a 27 year old Missourian with a loving husband and an 8 year old son. She currently owns and operates her own business, Mystickal Incense & More, which sells handmade candles, incense, bath & body products and other handcrafted products at <http://www.mystickalincense.com>