

## **Gallstone Removal**

### **What is gallstone removal?**

Gallstone removal involves the removal of gallstones from the gallbladder or the common bile duct.

### **Who can benefit from gallstone removal?**

Gallstones are caused by a variety of factors; the build-up of cholesterol in the bile inside the gallbladder, obesity, diabetes, Crohn's disease, and change in the chemical balance of the bile, among others. Gallstones can range massively in size, from almost unnoticeable to the size of a golf ball.

### **Procedure**

There are two options for the surgical removal of gallstones; both require the complete removal of the gallbladder.

- ✓ **Laparoscopic cholecystectomy** - Laparoscopic cholecystectomy is now the preferred method for gallbladder removal. A few small incisions (usually four) are made in the abdomen and a small tube with a camera attached - a laparoscope - is used to carry out the procedure, allowing the surgeon to see inside the abdomen. The gallbladder is separated from the rest of the abdomen, and removed through one of the incisions. This type of gallbladder removal does not require incisions in the abdominal muscles and results in quicker healing and fewer complications. Sometimes this type of gallbladder removal is performed through the belly button, resulting in minimal incisions and scarring.
- ✓ **Open cholecystectomy** - Open cholecystectomy is performed on a small amount of patients as it involves major abdominal surgery through a large cut in the abdomen, just below the ribs (around 4-6 inches long). Surgeons may opt for this procedure if it is difficult to perform gallbladder removal using a laparoscope (for example, patients suffering from obesity, or those who may have had previous abdominal surgery resulting in excessive scar tissue). The gallbladder is removed through the incision, along with any gallstones that may have found their way into the bile ducts. The incision is then closed.

### **Recovery period**

The recovering period for gallstone and ultimately gallbladder removal will depend on the procedure employed. Those who undergo open cholecystectomy may need up to six weeks off work, where as those who have laparoscopic cholecystectomy can usually resume normal activities after one week (avoiding strenuous exercise for several weeks).

## **Risks**

Depending on the type of gallbladder removal, risks include infection of the wound, blood clotting, damage to other organs, pain, bleeding, bloating, diarrhea, numbness, bleeding and breathing problems.