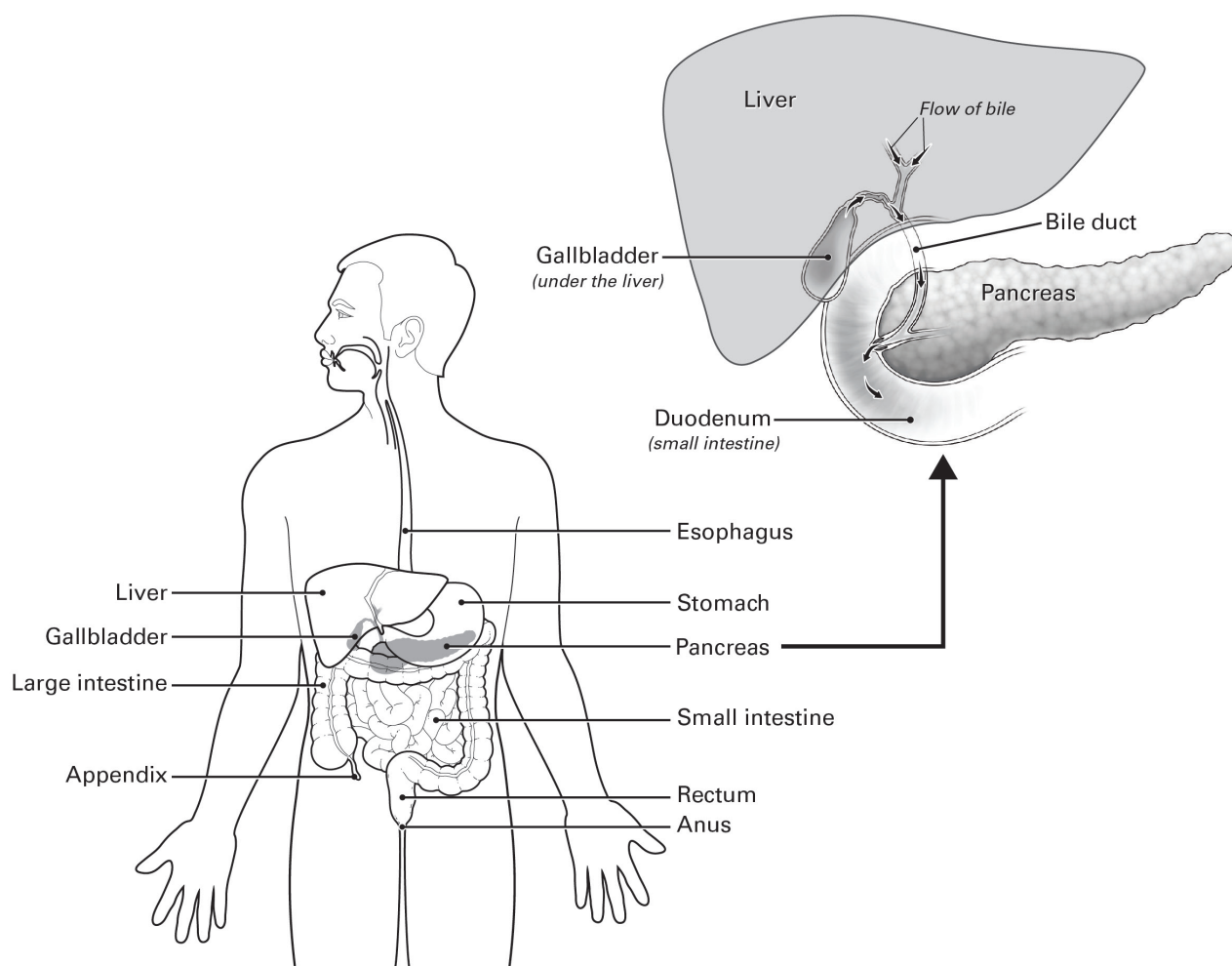


# Quick Facts About Gallbladder Cancer

## What is the gallbladder?

The gallbladder is a small, pear-shaped organ located under right side of the liver. The gallbladder concentrates and stores bile, a fluid produced in the liver. Bile helps digest fats in food as they pass through the small intestine. Although the gallbladder is helpful, most people live normal lives after having their gallbladder removed.



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## **What is gallbladder cancer?**

Gallbladder cancer starts when normal gallbladder cells become abnormal and start to grow out of control. This can form a mass of cells called a tumour. At first, the cells are precancerous, meaning they are abnormal but are not yet cancerous. If the precancerous cells change into cancerous or malignant cells, and/or spread to other areas of the body, this is called gallbladder cancer.

The most common type of gallbladder cancer is **adenocarcinoma**. Gallbladder adenocarcinoma is a cancer that starts in cells that line the inside of the gallbladder.

## **What are the common symptoms of gallbladder cancer?**

- Abdomen pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Jaundice (yellow skin)
- Larger gallbladder
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Swollen abdomen area
- Severe itching
- Black tarry stool

## **What does stage mean?**

Once a diagnosis of cancer has been made, the cancer will be given a stage, such as:

- where the cancer is located
- if or where it has spread
- if it is affecting other organs in the body (like the liver)

## **There are 5 stages for gallbladder cancer:**

**Stage 0:** There is no sign of cancer in the gallbladder.

**Stage 1:** Cancer has formed and the tumour has spread to a layer of tissue with blood vessels or to the muscle layer, but not outside of the gallbladder.

**Stage 2:** The tumour has spread beyond the muscle layer to the connective tissue around the muscle.

**Stage 3:** The tumour has spread through the thin layer of cells that cover the gallbladder and possibly to the liver, another nearby organ, and/or nearby lymph nodes.

**Stage 4:** The tumour has spread to a main blood vessel of the liver, 2 or more nearby organs or organs further away. The tumour may also have spread to nearby lymph nodes.

## **What does grade mean?**

Grade is also used to describe the cancer. Grade describes how much the tumour looks and acts like normal cells under a microscope. There are 4 grades (Grade 1 to Grade 4).

Lower grade cells look and act similar to normal cells. They are slow-growing and less likely to spread.

Higher grade cells look and act abnormally. They grow faster and are more likely to spread. The grade of cancer can help predict how quickly the cancer might spread.

## How is gallbladder cancer treated?

Gallbladder cancer treatment depends on many things including the tumour type, its location, stage and grade. The following are a few treatment options for gallbladder cancer that can also be used separately or together with one another:

- 1. Surgery:** Surgery involves making a cut in the abdomen and removing the gallbladder. This surgery is called a **cholecystectomy**. Depending on the cancer's stage, an extended cholecystectomy may be done, where the gallbladder, nearby lymph nodes and some parts of surrounding organs may be removed. Surgery is generally helpful in the earlier stages of the cancer.
- 2. Chemotherapy:** Chemotherapy uses drugs to kill or control cancer cells and is the most common standard therapy in advanced stages of the cancer. It is most often used when surgery cannot be offered because the cancer has spread outside of the gallbladder. It is also considered in some earlier stage cases after surgery.
- 3. Radiation therapy:** Radiation therapy is the use of high energy x-rays or other particles to kill cancer cells. It can be used for treatment or to control the symptoms and pain of advanced cancer. Sometimes doctors give radiation to shrink a tumour so it is easier to remove during surgery.
- 4. Supportive and Palliative therapy:** Palliative therapy is treatment given to help control or reduce symptoms caused by advanced cancer. The focus of care is on quality of life and comfort and can be offered by a team at the hospital or at home.

Other supportive care considered include procedures to relieve blockage in the gallbladder, gallbladder or bowel to ease pain and prevent jaundice or bowel blockage. This can be done by either placing a tube or, sometimes, a biliary or bowel bypass operation. Other supports can include removing fluid from the abdomen with a needle (paracentesis) or pain medicines to relieve discomfort.

## Coping with gallbladder cancer

Coping with the news of a cancer diagnosis can be very difficult. You are not alone. If you have any concerns or needs, please tell your health care team. They are here to care and support you through this time. Also, as a patient here at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, you have access to many resources to help you throughout your cancer journey.

These include:

- **Social workers** who can help you better cope with your diagnosis and help you access more resources.
- **Registered Dietitians** that specialize in cancer and can help you with your nutrition and diet concerns.
- **The Patient & Family Library** (on the main floor), where you have access to a wide range of resources (like books, Ebooks, audiobooks, DVDs), and you can ask a librarian to search for specific health information about the gallbladder.
- **ELLICSR:** the Health, Wellness & Cancer Survivorship Centre, where patients and their families can find information on health and wellness, speak with healthcare professionals, meet other patients, and take part in health and wellness programs like gentle exercise and cooking classes. ELLICSR is located in the basement of the Peter Munk Building in the Toronto General Hospital.
- **The Palliative Care team** who can provide the care, comfort and support needed for those with advanced cancer.

For more information about these supports or other services available to you, please ask a member of your health care team (such as your doctor or nurse).

## Questions to ask your doctor

Speaking to your health care team is important in helping you make decisions about your health care. Sometimes preparing a list of questions you want to ask can be helpful. Here is a list of common questions that will be covered in your consultation.

You may want to ask your team these or other questions if anything is missed or you need more information:



Here is a list of common questions you may want to ask your doctor:

1. Can you explain my pathology report (test results) to me?
2. What stage is my gallbladder cancer?
3. What grade is my gallbladder cancer?
4. Can you explain my treatment options?
5. What clinical trials are open to me?
6. How will this treatment benefit me?
7. What is the expected timeline for my treatment plan?
8. How will this treatment affect my daily life?
9. Will I be able to work, exercise or do my usual daily activities?
10. What are the possible long-term side effects of my cancer treatment?
11. Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
12. Who do I call if I have questions or a problem?
13. Is there anything else I should know?

## Other medical terms to know

- **Benign:** A tumour that is not cancerous.
- **Bile duct:** The tubes that drain the liver into the small bowel.
- **Biopsy:** The removal of a small cell sample that is used to check for cancer under a microscope.
- **Dysplasia:** An abnormal growth of precancerous cells.
- **Duodenum:** The upper portion of the small intestine.
- **Gallbladder:** A small, pear-shaped organ located under the liver. This organ concentrates and stores bile (a fluid that helps digestion).
- **Liver:** An organ located under your lungs and diaphragm (muscles that helps move your lungs). The liver collects and filters blood from the intestines, removing the waste form the body. It also stores energy and makes protein.
- **Lymph node:** A tiny, bean-shaped organ that is found throughout your body. They are an important part of your immune system, and help your body recognize and fight infection.
- **Malignant:** A tumour that is cancerous.
- **Metastasis:** The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body.
- **Oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer.
- **Prognosis:** Chance of recovery.
- **Radiation Oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in treating cancer using radiation therapy (high energy x-rays).
- **Surgical Oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in treating cancer using surgery.
- **Tumour:** A mass of cells that needs a biopsy or removal.



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