



Outpatient Laparoscopic Cholecystectomy

What is a laparoscopic cholecystectomy?

A laparoscopic cholecystectomy is an operation in which the surgeon removes your gallbladder with a laparoscope and other instruments placed inside your abdomen through small incisions. The laparoscope allows the doctor to see inside your belly cavity by displaying an image on a TV screen.

When is it used?

This operation is performed to eliminate gallbladder symptoms, which are usually, but not always, caused by stones in the gallbladder. These stones are usually made of cholesterol. Risk factors for forming stones include diet, female gender, pregnancy and use of birth control pills, obesity and family history of gallstones. The gallbladder takes in about 10% of the bile your liver makes and concentrates it. The gallbladder contracts in response to food intake to eject the bile into your intestine, which aids in digestion. Stones can block the gallbladder or main bile duct which can lead to pain. The gallbladder can become swollen, infected or can even rupture if blocked up. Some people have gallbladder symptoms, but no gallstones are detected by ultrasound, the main diagnostic study. Further testing can confirm if the gallbladder is the problem or not. A person lives a normal life after the gallbladder has been removed.

Alternative treatments include no further treatment, removing the gallbladder through a bigger incision (traditional approach), dissolving the stones, and breaking the stones up with sound waves. You should ask your surgeon about these choices.

How do I prepare for a laparoscopic cholecystectomy?

Plan ahead for your care and recovery after the operation. Allow time for rest and recovery. Try to find people to help you with your day-to-day activities.

Follow the instructions provided by the hospital and your doctor. Eat a light meal the evening before the procedure, such as soup and salad. Your surgeon may ask you to take a mild laxative. Do not eat or drink or smoke anything after midnight and on the morning of the procedure. You will be instructed which of your medications to take with a sip of water on the morning of the operation. Take a soap shower before coming to the hospital.

What happens on the day of the operation?

Once you are checked in, you will be asked to wait in a waiting room (seems logical). One of the pre-op nurses will soon escort you into pre-op itself. There you will change clothes in a private area, and may be asked to clip some of your body hair, if need be. After that, the nurse will interview you, as will members of the anesthesia team (doctors and nurses who will provide the anesthesia care required for the operation). You will have an IV started, and will be asked to empty your bladder right before going into the operating room. You will be given medications to control nausea, pain and anxiety even before the operation. Your surgeon should visit you in pre-op and answer any other questions that you might have.

Has the operation started yet?

Not quite yet. A general anesthetic will be given to keep you comfortable and relaxed during the operation. You will feel nothing and not be at all aware. You will wake up in the recovery room, feeling hungry and thirsty, and with little pain.

While you are asleep, the actual operation is performed. This usually takes about an hour, but can take more time with everything being just fine. There are hospital personnel available in the waiting area to keep you family informed of your status.

Your surgeon needs to explain the details of the operation to you.

What happens after the operation?

Typically, you will go to recovery for up to 2 hours, and then to the short stay unit on the 5th floor. You may be able to leave the hospital on the same day of the surgery, or the next 1 to 2 days. You must be able to tolerate a liquid diet and have your pain, if any, controlled with oral pain medication.

Post-operative instructions will be provided to you, verbally and in writing, with regard to activity, diet and bathing. You will be instructed to call your surgeon's office to make a follow-up appointment.

What are the benefits of this operation?

You will be rid of gallbladder pains and associated symptoms, with minimal pain and a much shorter recovery time.

What are the risks of the operation?

- Risks of anesthesia
- Bleeding and infection are risks with any operation
- Injury to the common (main) bile duct
- Bile leak
- Need to convert to a bigger incision

You should ask your surgeon how these risks apply to you.

When should I call the doctor?

Call the doctor immediately if:

- You develop a fever
- You are in a lot of pain
- You develop nausea or vomiting

Call the doctor during office hours if:

- You have questions about the procedure or its result
- You want to make another appointment