

Recovery After Gallbladder Surgery

What most patients can expect after a laparoscopic cholecystectomy

Gallbladder removal is one of the most common abdominal operations in the UK. Most procedures are performed laparoscopically (“keyhole surgery”), which usually allows for a quicker recovery. Although every patient heals at their own pace, the outline below describes what many people experience in the days and weeks after surgery.

Your First Few Days

How you may feel

- Mild to moderate discomfort around the incisions
- Shoulder-tip pain from the gas used during the procedure (usually temporary)
- Tiredness or reduced energy
- Mild bloating or changes in bowel habits

Wound care

- Glue dressings are placed over the incisions and are waterproof so showering and washing should be fine
- Please contact the team if the wounds look inflamed or infected

Eating and drinking

- You can drink soon after surgery
- Light meals are usually tolerated within 24–48 hours
- Gradual return to normal diet as comfort allows

Activity

- Walking is encouraged from the day of surgery
 - Avoid strenuous exercise and heavy lifting initially
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Week 1–2: Early Recovery

Pain and mobility

- Discomfort typically improves quickly over the first week

- Many people return to everyday activities within 7–10 days

Digestive changes

It is common to notice:

- Loose stools or more frequent bowel movements
- Temporary bloating or indigestion

These usually settle as your body adjusts to life without a gallbladder.

Returning to work

- Many people return to desk-based work within 1–2 weeks
 - Physically demanding jobs may require longer
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Week 3–4: Settling Back Into Your Routine

Diet

- Most patients eat a normal diet by this point
- Some may find rich, fatty or spicy foods cause temporary discomfort
- Adjustments are usually short-lived

Activity

- Gradual return to full activity
- Light exercise is normally comfortable
- More vigorous exercise should wait until you feel fully recovered

Symptoms that should be improving

- Fatigue
 - Bloating
 - Stool irregularities
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Longer-Term Recovery (4–8 Weeks)

Most people feel fully back to normal within **4–6 weeks**, although recovery can be longer if surgery was complex or if the gallbladder was very inflamed.

What typically improves

- Energy levels

- Comfort eating a wider range of foods
- Consistent bowel habits
- General wellbeing

Long-term dietary restrictions are uncommon, though some people continue to prefer lower-fat meals.

When to Seek Medical Advice

You should contact the team promptly if you experience:

- Increasing abdominal pain
- Fever or signs of infection around the wounds
- Persistent vomiting
- Jaundice (yellowing of the eyes or skin)
- Inability to drink enough fluids
- Severe or persistent digestive symptoms