

Your Guide to Recovering from Gallbladder Surgery



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Gallbladder Surgery Recovery: What to Expect

Whether you've had **laparoscopic/robotic (keyhole)** or **open gallbladder surgery**, knowing what comes next can make recovery smoother and less stressful. Below is a clear guide to help you understand each step of healing—what's normal, what to look out for, and how to care for yourself at home.

Recovery After Keyhole Gallbladder Surgery (Laparoscopic/Robotic-Assisted Surgery)

Laparoscopic surgery is the most common method for gallbladder removal. It is minimally invasive, which usually means a **quicker, less painful recovery**.

Right After Surgery

Once the procedure is complete, you will be taken to a recovery area, where recovery nurses will monitor your vital signs and ensure you are waking up safely from anaesthesia. You may feel groggy or slightly disoriented. Usually you may start to have clear fluids immediately and this can be built up accordingly. Pain is managed with medications.

In most cases, **patients go home the same day** or after an overnight hospital stay once they are sufficiently well enough to do so.

Managing Pain

You can expect some **mild to moderate discomfort** around the incision sites or in your shoulders (due to distension from gas used during surgery causing 'referred' pain). Most people manage well with **over-the-counter painkillers** like paracetamol or ibuprofen, though your doctor may provide stronger medications if needed.

Getting Back to Daily Activities

For the first few days, **early** light activities — such as walking — are encouraged as they can help prevent blood clots and speed up recovery.

- **Avoid heavy lifting or intense exercise** (like swimming, cycling, or running) for at least a week.
- You should be able to **return to most normal activities within 1–2 weeks**.
- Listen to your body, and do not rush the process.

Caring for Your Wounds

Your surgeon will give you instructions for keeping the small incisions clean and dry.

- **Showering is usually allowed after a day or two**, but avoid soaking in a bath or swimming pool until your wounds have fully healed.
- Keep the surgical dressings clean and replace them as directed.
- Take all medications as directed—**don't skip antibiotics** if prescribed.



Recovery After Open Gallbladder Surgery

If you had an **open cholecystectomy** – which involves a larger abdominal incision – your recovery will take a bit longer.

- Expect a recovery period of **4 to 6 weeks**.
 - You will need more **wound care**.
 - Activity may be limited initially due to wound discomfort but early mobilisation is critical to avoid blood clots, and you may need help at home for the first few days.
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Diet and Digestion After Surgery

Your digestive system needs time to adjust to life without a gallbladder, which means it is important to ease into your normal diet.

Tips for Eating After Surgery:

- Start with **small, low-fat meals**.
 - Avoid **greasy, fried, or spicy foods** at first, as they may cause discomfort or diarrhoea.
 - Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.
 - Gradually return to your regular diet over the following weeks, based on how you feel and your surgeon's advice.
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Tips for a Smooth Recovery

- **Follow your surgeon's instructions** carefully
- **Start walking daily** as soon as you are able
- **Avoid lifting anything heavy** for a few weeks
- Monitor your incision sites for signs of infection (increased redness, swelling, pus, or fever)
- **Call your hospital or the emergency department** if you experience severe pain, persistent nausea, or any unusual symptoms (see below)



Feeling Unwell After Surgery: What to Look Out for

Most people feel better soon after recovering from gallbladder removal, especially if they were suffering from painful gallstones. But it is important to monitor your health in the weeks that follow, and Mr Liao will review you a week or two following your surgery regardless.

Go to the emergency department if you have:

- Fever over 38°C (100.4°F)
 - Worsening pain that is not helped by medication
 - Redness, warmth, or pus around the wound
 - Yellowing of the skin or eyes (jaundice)
 - Nausea or vomiting that prevents you from drinking fluids
 - Swelling or pain in your legs (possible blood clot)
 - You have chest pain or difficulty breathing
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Final Thoughts

Recovery from gallbladder surgery varies depending on the type of procedure, but with proper care, most people return to their usual routines quickly and without complications. Laparoscopic or robotic surgery patients often bounce back in a week or two, while open surgery patients may need a bit longer — but both groups can look forward to relief from gallstone symptoms and a return to better health.

PDF Download:

- [Cholecystectomy patient information sheet – American College of Surgeons](#)
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Trusted cholecystectomy information pages:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/gallbladder-removal/what-happens/>
- <https://www.nuffieldhealth.com/treatments/laparoscopic-cholecystectomy>
- <https://www.hcahealthcare.co.uk/services/treatments/cholecystectomy>
- <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/treatment-tests-and-therapies/cholecystectomy>
- <https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/about-your-gallbladder-removal-surgery>

