

Gallstones

What are gallstones?

Gallstones [GAWL-stohnz] form when **bile** (a liquid in the gallbladder) crystallizes and becomes hard like a stone. The **gallbladder** is a small, pear-shaped organ found just below your liver. Its purpose is to store bile, which is made by the liver and is released into your intestines to help you digest fat.

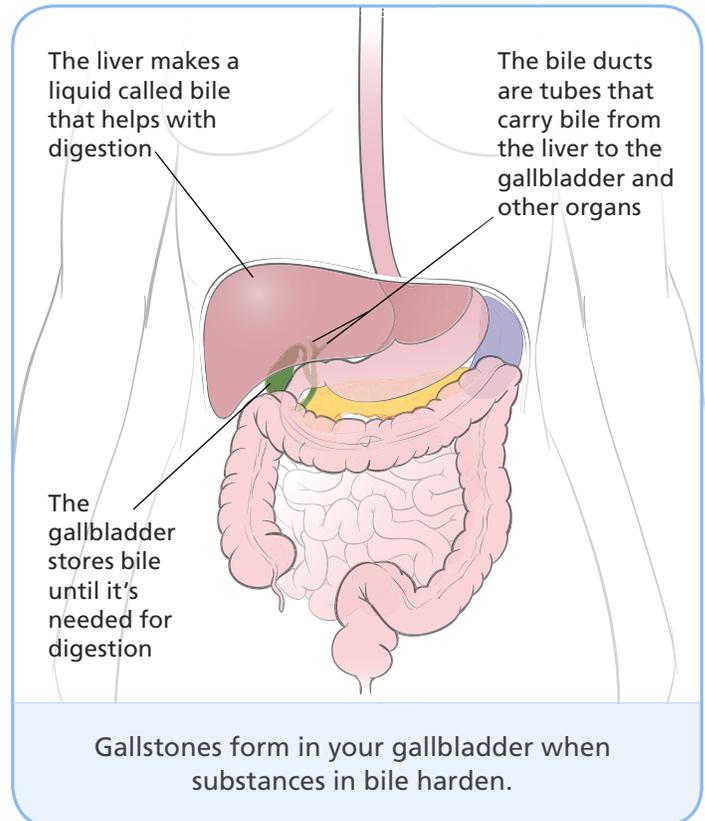
Who is at risk?

Gallstones are more common in:

- Women
- American Indians
- People of Spanish descent
- People older than 40 years
- People who are overweight
- People with a family history of the condition

There are several factors that can also make you more likely to have gallstones, such as:

- Taking birth control pills
- Diabetes
- Rapid weight loss
- Nutrition received through a vein for a long period of time (IV feedings)
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- A bone marrow or organ transplant
- Medical conditions that cause too many red blood cells to be destroyed



What are the symptoms?

Gallstones often don't cause symptoms unless they block the flow of bile from the gallbladder to your small intestine. When they cause "attacks," it usually happens after you eat. Symptoms of an attack may include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Pain in the abdomen (belly), back, or under the right shoulder

