

Going home with a cholecystostomy (pigtail drain)

Information for patients



Outstanding
Care for One+All

What is a cholecystostomy (pigtail drain)?

- A cholecystostomy is a procedure to place a small drain into your gallbladder.
- This is usually done if your gallbladder is blocked by a stone, causing inflammation, infection, and pain.

Why do I need a cholecystostomy drain?

- To relieve severe inflammation or infection in your gallbladder.
- It may be a temporary treatment before surgery to remove your gallbladder.
- If you are not well enough for surgery, the drain helps manage symptoms.

How long will I have the drain?

- Usually, the drain stays in for at least 6 weeks.
- This helps prevent bile leaking from the gallbladder after removal.
- Sometimes the drain stays longer, especially if surgery is delayed.
- You will have follow-up X-rays with contrast dye to check your bile ducts and plan treatment.
- You can be cared for at home while the drain is in place.

Will it cause any pain or discomfort?

- Some discomfort around the drain site is normal.
- Painkillers like paracetamol should help.
- If pain becomes severe, contact your GP or specialist nurse.

Going home with the drain

You will be discharged once your doctor feels you are well enough.

The drain may be:

- capped and coiled under a dressing on your abdomen.
- Left open and draining into a leg bag, which you will need to empty and measure daily.

Community nurses will visit to:

- change dressings weekly
- flush the drain with saline daily to prevent blockages (if needed).

If you feel worried or need support, community nursing can help.

Can I shower with the drain?

- Yes, you can shower.
- The dressing will be covered with a waterproof layer.

What should I look out for?

Contact your GP if you notice these signs of infection:

- redness spreading around the drain site
- pus or signs of infection.



What if the drain falls out?

Contact the specialist nurses immediately.

If this happens out of hours and you feel pain, go to the Emergency department.

How is the drain removed?

- When safe, the surgical team will arrange removal.
- You will attend a clinic or Same Day Surgical Assessment (SDSA) at Royal Cornwall Hospital, Treliske.
- Removal is usually painless but may cause a pulling sensation.
- The drain is unlocked or cut, then gently pulled out.
- A dressing will cover the site after removal.
- Some bile leakage may occur but should not be excessive or last long.
- Keep the site covered until it is fully healed or scabbed over.

Contact us

For any concerns during office hours (Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 5:30pm) contact:

Louise Goldsmith / Paul Rosenfeld, Upper GI Nurse Specialists

➔ Telephone: 07785 744872 / 07557 499244

For emergencies outside office hours, contact:

Emergency Surgical Unit (ESU)

➔ Telephone: 01872 253921



**To get this information in a different format
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