COMPLICATIONS AFTER GALLBLADDER REMOVAL

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There are many complications that can occur after gallbladder removal surgery. Some are immediate and some can happen years after surgery. I had my gallbladder removed seven years ago. Since that time, I have had to deal with many digestive problems that I never thought would be issues. My gallbladder was removed because it was not emptying; I did not have gallstones.

Directly following the surgery, I was very sore. The incisions hurt and burned. I felt nauseous and dizzy for days. I couldn't eat much at all. Even chicken soup seemed to burn. It took about six weeks to feel better and be able to eat. Within a few weeks, I was eating fine and without pain in the gallbladder/shoulder blade area as I had before the surgery. I learned very quickly that I could not digest fats well at all. If I ate fatty foods, they would quickly, but painlessly, come out of my stomach usually with diarrhea.

For the two to three years following surgery, I ate quite normally and then digestive issues seemed to come quite regularly. I still could not eat fatty foods at all but most other foods settled. About three years ago (four years after surgery) I started to get some major symptoms of food intolerance – I would get very shaky after eating and at times, the diarrhea was profound. I had routine tests done at the doctor's office, but they showed nothing.

As of two years ago, I sought alternative testing because I was having issues eating many foods. I would get lots of stomach pain and the diarrhea seemed never ending. I was dehydrated often and would get severe heart palpitations. I also started having stomach spasms that were very painful. I lost weight and no solutions were evident. After having food intolerance testing, blood testing, a comprehensive digestive stool analysis, and adrenal fatigue testing, I found that I was severely intolerant to gluten. I cut out gluten completely. At first, for about a year, this seemed like a miracle cure. If I did not eat gluten, my digestive issues were almost non-existent. I ate most anything gluten free and felt great.

A year ago (six years after gallbladder surgery) I got very ill while eating beans and hot dogs. I was relaxing and eating and all of a sudden, it felt as if my heart was stopping. I started breathing heavily and my stomach was having severe spasms. I had a fever and horrible burning in my stomach as well. I stopped eating immediately and went to bed. I was very ill for about a week and was having weird symptoms. At times, I would wake up in the night hot and then get very cold and start shaking. The burning in my stomach was relentless.

I went to the doctor and was told that I had an ulcer. I was given medication. Within two days, I was sicker than ever. I went back to the doctor and was told I needed different ulcer medication. I tried it and got sicker. Unfortunately, this downward spiral wouldn't stop. It went on for three months. During this time, I was given several medications, many of which contained gluten. (I took Librax, Flagyl, Asacol, Prednisone, and others.) I got much sicker. I could not take anything that contained ibuprofen. It made me very ill and I could not feel my hands or feet. My heart

would race. No matter what I tried, the stomach spasms seemed to intensify.

As I got sicker, I was put in the hospital for several days. I was completely dehydrated and too weak for them to do any testing on an outpatient basis. I had every digestive test available and nothing seemed abnormal - except that I couldn't eat anything and my stomach was burning horribly; I was getting weaker by the day. The diarrhea had become unstoppable.

I sought more help in a nearby state and was told that I had excess bile in my system as a result of the gallbladder removal. The doctor I went to was surprised that the GI hospital I had been in didn't think of this. I was given cholestyramine (also called Questran.) This medication is a bile salt and works as it absorbs excess bile. I started taking it immediately and within about three days felt a little better; the horrible burning was easing some. I was told that I'd have to take this daily for the rest of my life.

It is now a year later and I still battle GI issues but things are getting better. I take the bile salts when I need them, but not every day. At times, I have more bile issues and try to treat them quickly.

I have had to do many things to get well. I have listed ideas below that my husband and I do:
1. **Gluten Removal** – It has taken a long time but I have (as completely as possible) removed gluten from my diet. I eat brown rice, quinoa, and more. I use many flours when cooking – brown rice, sweet rice, white rice, coconut, sorghum, teff, tapioca, and buckwheat.

2. **Organic Foods** – When shopping, I always go to my local farm first. It is here that I buy milk and eggs. The grocery store brands do not settle well for me. We do not use margarine; we use real butter.

3. **Organic Cooking Oils** – There are good fats and there are bad fats. My body doesn't do fat well at all but I can digest Extra Virgin, Expeller Pressed Olive Oil and Coconut Oil. We cook with these as well as real butter.

4. **Gardening** – We grow our own garden in the summer. It is amazing at the amount of fresh vegetables that I can eat. Our garden is grown organically and cleanly. We grew many types of lettuce, green onions, green beans, cucumbers, kale, spinach, swiss chard, spinach, carrots and more.

5. **Shop at the Local Farmer's Market** – If it's not in my garden, I try to get it from an organic farmer. During the summer, we also bought many vegetables from local farmers.

6. **Eliminate Processed Foods** – This is a hard one but we've managed to do it well. We do not eat processed foods unless we have to – and we rarely have to do this. Our foods are "whole" foods like fruits and vegetables. We buy as much from local, organic farmers as is possible. We cook all of our meals and pay careful attention to the ingredients.

7. **Stop Eating Out** – It's sad but true (I so enjoyed letting someone else cook for me) that if you are diet conscious, you can't eat out all the time. Foods in restaurants are usually the

cheapest, most mass produced foods available. They are also full of GMO's (genetically modified organisms), antibiotics, and growth hormones. We eat out rarely and when we do, it's in a place where there are good, gluten-free salads available.

8. **Drastically Reduce Sweets** – A gluten-diet can be full of sugar. It is important to watch one's sugar intake when eliminating gluten. We do not eat sweets often and instead try to substitute a "sweet" vegetable, like carrot sticks.

9. **Hydrate Often and Use Glass Containers** – If my stomach is bothering, I revert back to rice and water as needed. I try not to drink from plastic containers and instead carry a glass bottle of water with me most everywhere that I go. There are nice glass bottles available with plastic coating on the outside to protect them. I drink water from my well as much as possible and my drink of choice is water.

10. **Rest and Rejuvenate** – Stress will compound digestive issues. I have had to make a conscious effort to rest and put myself first. This is not a strength for me! When my stomach starts to hurt, I get out a good book and read. This is relaxing for me.

If you are having issues and have had your gallbladder removed, I would suggest that you investigate bile salts. For me, they were an extremely important piece to the puzzle to help digest foods and be able to eat again. I do not need to take them every day but find that at more stressful times, I do need to take them. The bile salts that I take come in powder form and can be easily mixed into water. They work almost immediately.

There are many things that will help digestion, including the ten steps above. Digestive issues are miserable! Finding the right combination and taking steps toward a healthier diet are very important.