

Laser lithotripsy for difficult-to-treat bile duct stones

Information for the public

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This procedure works well for difficult-to-treat bile duct stones but there is not enough evidence about its long-term safety. So it can only be done with special arrangements. This means you will have regular appointments afterwards to check how well it is working or whether it has caused problems. The procedure should only be done in specialised centres with experience of managing difficult-to-treat bile duct stones.

The flow of bile out of the liver and the gallbladder can become blocked by stones in the bile ducts. In this procedure, which is done under a general anaesthetic, a flexible tube with a camera on the end (an endoscope) is passed through the mouth, stomach and the small intestine and into the bile ducts. A small fibre is put through the endoscope, which emits laser light onto the stone to break it up (lithotripsy). Small pieces are removed, but small sand-like pieces may be retained and will be gradually passed through the body. This procedure usually takes 30 to 60 minutes. The aim is to break up bile duct stones that cannot be treated using conventional techniques.

The [NHS website](https://www.nhs.uk) may have information on your condition and treatment options.

Is this procedure right for me?

You should be included in [making decisions about your care](#).

Your healthcare professionals should explain the risks and benefits of this procedure and how it is done. They should discuss your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns. They should offer you more information about the procedure. Your family or carers can be involved if you want or need them to be.

You will be asked to decide whether you agree (consent) to have the procedure. Find out more about [giving consent to treatment on the NHS website](#).

Some questions to think about

- How many appointments will I need?
- What are the possible benefits? How likely am I to get them?
- What are the risks or side effects? How likely are they?
- Will I have to stay in hospital?
- What happens if it does not work or something goes wrong?
- What happens if I do not want the procedure?
- Are other treatments available?

More information

- [NICE's information on HealthTech guidance](#) explains what HealthTech is and how we assess it.
- [NICE's information on HealthTech recommendations](#) explains what special arrangements are.

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