These days, weight-loss surgery—often called “bariatric surgery”—is more popular than ever. It restricts food intake and/or interrupts the normal digestive process. Depending on the method, surgeons staple the stomach or bind it with an adjustable band to reduce stomach size and make patients feel full quickly. Surgeons perform approximately 220,000 weight-loss operations per year in the United States, and that number is likely to increase as surgical techniques and options continue to improve.

Bariatric surgery is generally reserved for people who have a body mass index of 40 or greater. For women, that means being 80 or more pounds overweight, and for men, at least 100 pounds overweight. Anyone qualifying for surgery must have made numerous unsuccessful attempts with traditional methods of losing weight—going on diets, changing eating patterns, working with nutritionists and increasing physical activity. It’s meant as a treatment of last resort, though that is not often how it is marketed or perceived by the general public.

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to weight loss. But that doesn’t stop us from searching for the holy grail of losing weight quickly and keeping it off permanently.

Think You Know the Facts? Not So Fast.

By Medical Editor Nick Yphantides, MD, MPH

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to weight loss. But that doesn’t stop us from searching for the holy grail of losing weight quickly and keeping it off permanently.

As a primary care physician who lost 270 pounds 12 years ago without surgery, I frequently get asked about weight-loss surgery. In fact, many people assume that the only way I could have lost that weight is through bariatric surgery, but that is simply not the case. Let’s take a closer look at five myths related to weight-loss surgery:

Myth 1: Bariatric surgery is a quick and easy fix for rapid and drastic weight loss. The reality is that surgery for weight reduction is not a miracle procedure. It still requires a substantial and lifelong commitment to lifestyle change and behavior modification. The surgery
alone will not help someone lose weight and keep it off. While providing a built-in mecha-
nism to limit food intake, patients still have to change their eating and exercise habits. With-
out those changes, individuals who have sur-
gery are more likely to have limited initial success and to regain their weight over time.

**Myth 2:** Surgery is the easy way out, and obese people who opt for surgery are lazy. The American Medical Association classifies obesity as a medical disease. There is nothing easy about any kind of weight loss. It involves changing daily habits. For many, it is not something they can accomplish on their own. Many who have excess weight also suffer discriminations and judgment, such as being called lazy, because of their weight. Depending on insurance coverage and the degree of obesity and associated compli-
cations, real financial burdens and health concerns may accompany a decision to have surgery. Finally, depending on the kind of procedure and the quality of the surgical team, potential complications and lasting impacts could make surgery anything but the easy way out.

**Myth 3:** Weight-loss surgery is too dan-
gerous. In reality, any type of surgery has associated risks and complications that could be as severe as death. But surgical advances and improvements in techniques have helped to minimize risks. Most weight-loss surgeries now are laparoscopic, a method that uses fiber optic lights and small cameras inserted in the body to show a surgeon tissues and organs on a monitor. In this type of surgery, small inci-
sions result in faster healing, less pain and less scarring. And consider the risk of not hav-
ing surgery: For some patients, surgery is the last resort for overcoming life-threatening conditions associated with Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and/or severe sleep apnea.

**Myth 4:** You will never regain weight after surgery. As previously mentioned, bariatric surgery is only a tool. The amount of weight lost after surgery depends on each per-
son and the decisions he or she makes. The patient’s motivation, follow-through and com-
mitment to a healthier lifestyle directly relates to his or her ability to sustain weight loss. Many patients do regain some weight. There are no guarantees of being thin after surgery, but if patients follow professional ad-
vise and stay involved in their support groups, then the chances of not regaining weight are greatly improved.

**Myth 5:** Women cannot get pregnant after having bariatric surgery. In reality, women affected by obesity can have a hard time getting pregnant due to hormone imbal-
ances and fertility issues like irregular menstrual cycles. Many women experience a higher level of fertility after weight-loss surgery as a result of their healthier weight. They may also experience a lower risk of complica-
tions associated with obesity and pregnancy and can generally expect to have normal deliveries.

Ultimately, you have to consider the po-
tential benefits and drawbacks of weight-loss surgery to determine what will really work best for you. Whether you choose to have weight-loss surgery or not, making real and lasting lifestyle changes is the only way to lose weight and keep it off. But you can do it. I’m living proof!

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