



## **BASSETT HEALTHCARE**

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Obesity is a major cause of disease, disability and death in America. At Bassett Healthcare, this medical condition is a primary focus of our research efforts. To raise awareness and increase understanding of medical interventions related to obesity, Bassett staff members have written a series of two columns regarding gastric surgery. Informational sessions on this topic will be offered in area communities in the coming months.

### **Surgical Options for Managing Severe Obesity**

Obesity is an increasing problem in the United States affecting the overall health and well being of our population. Many efforts have been initiated to help curb this problem with limited success. One statistic helps put this epidemic in perspective: Obesity is on the verge of surpassing smoking as the leading cause of preventable death in America.

Many of us have heard the term Body Mass Index (BMI), which is a recording of your weight in pounds divided by your height squared (in inches) and multiplied by 703. It is a complicated formula but it helps us quantify obesity. The healthy BMI is 20 to 22 and a BMI over 25 is considered overweight. A BMI over 35 is considered obese. Obesity has serious consequences for individuals and our society as a whole.

Medical diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure become more common as BMI increases over 25. As a patient's Body Mass Index increases, life expectancy decreases. Hence, a person with a BMI of 35 has a life expectancy seven years less than a person with BMI in healthy range.

The human and financial costs of obesity are significant. In fact, with increased obesity, a person can lose over 20 years of their life expectancy. It has been estimated that as of 2000, costs related to the treatment of the medical conditions associated with obesity account for \$117 billion dollars a year.

Preventing obesity is the best scenario. Once a person has developed obesity in their adulthood it is very difficult to correct. Significant weight loss is challenging and studies have shown that 95 percent of people who lose weight will gain that amount back, and many will gain even more weight over time. Surgery to lose weight is a choice that a number of severely obese patients are selecting to improve their lives. Recent medical advances provide multiple surgical options for dangerously obese patients to consider for weight reduction.

The most common and best-studied operation is Gastric Bypass Surgery. During bypass surgery, most of the stomach is closed off leaving just a small portion, about an ounce or two, in place. A direct connection is then made between this portion and the lower intestine. Afterward, as food is eaten, it travels to the small portion of the stomach or pouch. From the pouch the food bypasses the remaining stomach and initial part of the intestine to join the normal intestinal track about two to three feet downstream.

Typically a patient who has a successful gastric bypass will lose half their excess weight during the first 12 to 18 months after surgery. Some patients lose well over 100 or 200 pounds. Many medical problems related to excess weight are improved or eliminated after a gastric bypass. Probably the most impressive result of gastric bypass is the fact that about 75 percent of patients with diabetes before surgery will be cured of diabetes. However, due to the complicated nature of the gastric bypass there are significant risks. Nationwide, the mortality rate of this procedure appears to be about two percent.

Adjustable gastric banding is an alternative to gastric bypass and has lower mortality and fewer complications associated with it. In this procedure, a “band” is placed around a portion of the stomach to restrict food intake. In most cases patients go home the day after surgery. The band is adjustable to allow a better fit for individual patients. With gastric banding, the weight loss is slower than with gastric bypass, but some studies show that on average after four or five years the total weight loss is similar to that of gastric bypass. The other benefit of gastric banding is that the body’s normal intestinal tract is not altered. However, a band may shift from its initial position and require adjustment or removal over time.

Either of these surgeries can result in dramatic changes for the patient and require significant lifestyle changes. The patient’s body size will alter greatly and so too will patterns of eating. After these procedures, it is necessary to consume much smaller food portions. Nutritional supplements may be needed.

Although surgery to lose weight has profound effects on a person’s lifestyle, the positive impacts usually outweigh the negative. On average after surgery patients will be healthier, happier and live longer. These surgeries are not without potential problems and complications, some serious enough to cause death related to the surgery.

Surgery to lose weight is complicated and it must be chosen based on an individual evaluation. A great deal of time and effort must go into this important medical decision. Bassett Healthcare has helped many patients achieve better health with gastric bypass and banding surgery. To learn more about obesity prevention and treatment, call 1-800-BASSETT.

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