



CHERYL IRVIN calls July 24, 2014, her re-birth date. “That’s the day I took my life back,” she says.

Irvin, who had been heavy all her life, managed to lose weight over the years but always gained it back. Then in 2012, her knee gave out while she was standing. She had other health issues associated with being overweight. She had high blood pressure and prediabetes. Being diagnosed with sleep apnea was the turning point for her as she didn’t want to begin using a breathing device.

“I’ve got to take charge of my life,” Irvin decided. Through Bassett

Healthcare Network’s weight-loss program, she had gastric sleeve surgery. “It’s the best thing I ever did,” she says.

Nearly a third of all U.S. adults ages 20 and older are overweight—just under 38 percent are obese and 7.7 percent are extremely obese. Weight-related conditions are on the rise, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, some cancers and osteoarthritis.

Managing weight is challenging, and the reasons for being overweight are complex. The nonsurgical options of exercising and eating

optimally, along with the guidance of a health care professional, should always be tried first to manage weight loss. But for people for whom nothing seems to work, weight-loss surgery can be an effective option.

“I wanted to be able to retire and enjoy my retirement,” says Irvin, of East Worcester. “I had considered weight-loss surgery many times before, but finally I said, ‘now’s the time to do it,’ and I jumped right into it with both feet.”

At 342 pounds, Irvin began Bassett’s weight-loss program. Stephanie Ocegüera, MD, performed gastric sleeve surgery, reducing Irvin’s stomach to the size of a banana. In total, Irvin lost 165 pounds—“half of myself,” she says.

“You’re getting a second chance,” she says. “You can move forward and do all the things you want to do. It’s a whole new life.”

Irvin has since become a certified Zumba instructor.

Time to take control

Weight-loss (bariatric) surgery may be a good option if:

- ▶ Repeated attempts with nonsurgical methods to control your weight have failed.
- ▶ You are motivated and have realistic expectations.
- ▶ Your BMI is greater than or equal to 40.

- ▶ Your BMI is greater than or equal to 35, and you have at least one obesity-related health condition.
- ▶ You know the risks and benefits.
- ▶ You can commit to adjustments in your lifestyle, such as regular exercise and changes in how and what you eat—to keep the weight off.