

Preventing Weight Regain after Bariatric Surgery

Weight regain following bariatric surgery is a topic of concern no matter what form of bariatric procedure you had. The ultimate goals, regardless of the type of procedure you had, are to improve your overall health following weight loss and to sustain your weight loss over time.

Sustained weight loss is the result of:

- making consistently healthy food choices
- maintaining portion control
- exercising on a regular basis
- drinking plenty of water
- eating breakfast
- planning your meals and following your plan
- keeping food and exercise journals
- getting good rest

The good news is that losing weight following your bariatric procedure is relatively easy for the first several months. The *realistic news* is that a gastric procedure only addresses one of the things in the list above necessary for sustained weight loss: portion control. That means you are responsible for the others. Ultimately, you are responsible for all of the items on the list, including portion control, as it *is* possible to overeat, in spite of having a stomach pouch the size of an egg. If you had your bariatric procedure done recently, you may be wondering how you could possibly ever overeat given the pain you now experience if you eat too much at one time. If you are a year or more out from your surgery, you may be shaking your head with the understanding of how it is possible to consume portions that are “too big”. Remember that “grazing” is equivalent to eating portions that are too large; it just takes longer to do so.

The “how to” of weight regain prevention has already been given to you in the list above. Yes, it is that simple. And no – it is not easy. Perhaps it is frustrating to realize that this list consists of the exact same elements required for any successful weight loss program or “diet”. Being 100 or more pounds overweight, you needed the bariatric procedure to jump-start your weight loss. You *do* lose weight quickly following your bariatric procedure! You are initially

consuming so few calories that you lose a lot of weight in a very short period of time. As the weeks following your procedure go by, you gradually introduce solid foods into your diet, focusing on eating a lot of protein. This is vitally important for nutritional reasons. The high protein diet also assists you in losing weight rapidly.

Many people are incredibly motivated to exercise during the initial months following surgery. For some, it is the first time they have felt like expending energy through exercise in years. The increase in bodily movement also contributes to rapid weight loss following your bariatric procedure. People who do not engage in regular physical exercise after a bariatric procedure will lose weight following their bariatric procedure, although they risk being lulled into a false belief that exercise is not necessary to lose weight and to sustain weight loss. If you do embark on an exercise program as soon as possible following surgery, you are at an advantage in the long run as exercising becomes a newly established habit associated with your healthy lifestyle. You will also experience the numerous benefits of physical exercise besides rapid weight loss. People who exercise regularly have more energy and are less depressed than people who do not. Exercisers report feeling better about themselves and their circumstances than people who do not routinely exercise.

Danger and The Bottom Line

When all is said and done, people who have 100+ pounds to lose and people who have 20, 30 or 60 pounds to lose all achieve greater success in sustaining their weight loss for a lifetime if they do these things:

- making consistently healthy food choices
- maintaining portion control
- exercising on a regular basis
- drinking plenty of water
- eating breakfast
- planning your meals and following your plan
- keeping food and exercise journals
- getting good rest

- not snacking

The danger for patients who have had a bariatric procedure who have not done the things on this list but have lost a lot of weight in the months immediately following their surgery is a false sense that the weight will always “just fall off”. After all, the weight does seem to just “fall off” in the weeks and months following a bariatric procedure – whether you consistently do the things listed above or not. Yes, the weight seems to “fall off” immediately, but the time does come when the weight stabilizes. Patients sometimes panic wondering why they have quit losing weight. If they are regularly engaging in every one of the items on the list above, the weight plateau is likely due to having hit a healthy weight for their body. If they are not actively doing the things listed above and still have several pounds to lose before reaching their goal weight, the reasons, if not medically based are self-explanatory.

Once a bariatric patient has lost the majority of their excess weight, they are on an even keel with the person who has a minimal or moderate amount of weight to lose. All persons seeking sustained weight loss must practice the same set of healthy behaviors.

It's Hard

Taken one at a time, none of the things on the following list is difficult:

- making consistently healthy food choices
- maintaining portion control
- exercising on a regular basis
- drinking plenty of water
- eating breakfast
- planning your meals and following your plan
- keeping food and exercise journals
- getting good rest
- not snacking

The idea of doing every one of the things on the list every single day can seem overwhelming. The

old “diet mentality” can set in, bringing with it ‘stinkin’ thinkin’ from the past: “It’s too hard. Why bother”... “I already blew it today, I may as well start over tomorrow”... “I’m a failure so why should I keep trying”... and so on. In order to be successful and do each of the healthy behaviors on the list so that you insure sustained weight loss and improved health, you need help.

How to Succeed

1. Let others help you.

There are hundreds of thousands of people who really do understand what you are going through because they have done the same thing themselves! Knowing that you are not the first or only person to get discouraged, frustrated, and angry because you want to eat but can’t helps you to deal with those feelings – especially if you reach out to others and talk about it. Sharing the excitement of the milestones as you fit into a size you haven’t worn since you were a teenager or when you finally fly on an airplane and fit comfortably into the seat is equally important. You receive praise and also encourage someone else to keep going so they can enjoy the successes, too. Join a local bariatric support group and log on frequently to the support groups on line.

2. Make yourself a graph.

Take a piece of paper and write each of the items on the list above down the left-hand column. At the top of the page make seven columns – one for each day of the week. At the end of each day, check off each of the things you did on the list that day. This gives you a visual reminder of what you need to do and you lets you see how many of the items on the list you complete! If your weight is coming off and staying off, you probably have most things on the list checked off every day! If you do 100% of the things on that list every single day, you have 100% chance of improving your health and keeping your weight off. If you do half of the things on the list... well, you do the math!

3. Learn to identify your feelings.

Many people, after having a bariatric procedure, realize that at least some of their eating was “emotional” in nature. Since having your procedure, you may find that when you are upset you automatically crave chocolate. Or when you are happy your first thought may be to drive to the nearest ice cream parlor. Identifying your feelings is the first step in learning to deal with them

in a way other than with food. Every day, play the simple “feelings game”, and include your entire family, as it is important for everyone to be able to identify and deal with their feelings. To play, one person chooses Mad, Sad, Glad or Scared. Then each person says something that happened in their day when they experienced that feeling. You can also talk about how you dealt with the feeling. For example, “Today I felt scared when another driver pulled out in front of my car. At first I wanted to scream and holler at them. Instead, I decided to be grateful that they didn’t hit me and we were all safe”. After everyone shares something they were scared about, you pick another feeling until everyone has addressed all four of these feelings. Most other feelings fall underneath one of those four feelings. Anxious, worried, and nervous are forms of fear. Excited, thrilled and happy are varieties of glad. You get it!

4. Get professional help if you need it.

It’s no secret that many factors combined to result in your being obese: genetics, medical problems and/or medications, habits, and “issues”. It can be a tremendous relief to have a counselor to talk to if you have problems that interfere with your weight loss. For instance, some obese people used extra weight to “hide” their bodies. If they were sexually abused in the past, they may not want to show any curves or distinct physical features that could be alluring, for fear they may be abused again. Although they may not consciously fear losing weight, they could sabotage their weight loss so they don’t attract unwanted attention. If you continue to struggle to do the things on the list, even though you honestly want to, it may be a good idea to talk with a counselor. There may be problems lying beneath the surface of your consciousness that a therapist can help you overcome. A good listener who is objective when it comes to your life is a luxury... like getting a massage ... only for the mind instead of the body.

5. Learn to relax.

Stress is one a contributor to physical problems. Stress also leads to eating without intention. You know... not having time to pay attention to what you are eating so you end up eating too much of the wrong stuff. You already know the results. It is proven that using simple relaxation techniques can prevent and help cure health problems caused or made worse by stress. Easy relaxation tools include diaphragmatic breathing (deep breathing into the abdomen)

and Herbert Benson's Relaxation Response (a few minutes of quiet time repeating a positive message to yourself); both can be found on line. Talking to a friend, taking a walk, soaking in the tub and gardening are all stress relievers. Take time for yourself!

Sustained weight loss does require effort. The benefits for your health and your relationships are worth every ounce of effort you exert! You will feel better, look better and be happier! And we all know that when you're happier, so are the people around you!

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