



## *The critical questions you're not asking before your bariatric surgery*

If you or someone you know is considering bariatric surgery, chances are you already have a million thoughts running through your mind. But when you're preparing for a life-changing event like bariatric surgery, emotions can sometimes get in the way of logic and you can forget to ask the important questions.

The Whey Protein Institute consulted with Jody Nicholson, LPN and bariatric surgery coordinator at St. Paul Surgeons\*/United Hospital\* in St. Paul, Minnesota, to find out the critical questions patients should be asking, but may overlook, when considering bariatric surgery.

## *What is required to prepare for surgery?*

Before you can schedule your bariatric surgery, most surgeons will require you to undergo an extensive psychological evaluation and counseling sessions (if indicated) to make sure you are prepared for rapid weight loss. Your psychologist and surgeon need to deem you physically and emotionally ready to handle the lifestyle changes that follow bariatric surgery to ensure you experience life long weight loss success.

Some patients will also be required to go on a protein liquid diet to help them lose weight pre-surgery. If you are "centrally obese" (you carry most of your weight in the center of your body) or if you have an enlarged liver, you will most likely be required to lose weight pre-surgery, as the additional body fat can make it difficult for your surgeon to maneuver their instruments while performing surgery.

This high-protein liquid diet usually consists of three protein shakes (made with high quality whey protein) per day and one planned, healthy meal.

## *What will eating be like after surgery?*

When you undergo bariatric surgery, your stomach is reduced to about 75-90% of its original size, depending upon the specific operation. This drastic reduction in stomach size means you have to make major adjustments to your eating habits. A high-protein, nutrient-dense diet is required to maintain a healthy lifestyle post-surgery.

After surgery, you will most likely be required to follow an eating plan that looks something like this:

- Immediately post-surgery, you will be put on a liquid diet.
- Three months\*\* post-surgery, you can consume about one-fourth cup of solid food per meal\*\*\*.
- Four-six months\*\* post-surgery, you can consume about one-half cup of solid food per meal\*\*\*.
- One year\*\* post-surgery, you can consume about one-two cups of solid food per meal\*\*\*.
- A couple years\*\* post-surgery you can consume about two-three cups of solid food per meal\*\*\*.

## *Will I have excess skin post-surgery?*

Most patients will experience excess skin as a result of bariatric surgery. The excess skin in the lower stomach area is called the pannus, or abdominal "apron." This skin can be removed about 18-24 months after surgery with a procedure called a panniculectomy.

A panniculectomy may be covered by insurance if it is deemed medically necessary, that is, if you experience back pain, rashes, etc... as a result of the excess skin.

Surgery to remove excess skin around the arms and inner thighs is a plastic surgery procedure and is not usually covered by insurance.

## Will I be able to have kids after surgery?

Many people experience infertility because of being overweight or obese. However, many people are able to have children after bariatric surgery, even those who were unable to conceive before surgery.

It is also interesting to note that studies have shown that offspring of patients who have undergone bariatric surgery are less prone to obesity than those of obese parents who have not undergone surgery.

Even on the restricted post-surgery diet, female bariatric surgery patients are able to consume the nutrients they and their baby need in order to be healthy, provided they are following the proper post-surgery dietary guidelines given by their surgeon/dietician.

Most surgeons will recommend that you wait two years after bariatric surgery to try to conceive. This gives your body time to recover from surgery and you time to adjust to your new lifestyle before taking on the added responsibility of pregnancy and a baby.

## What changes in my life might I expect after surgery?

Many patients do not foresee the various emotional changes that come along with the physical changes of bariatric surgery.

- **Depression:** Depression is common in the first three months after surgery, especially for emotional eaters. If you had been an emotional eater, bariatric surgery forces you to deal with your emotions in a way other than eating. This can lead to feelings of depression.
- **Anxiety:** Hormonal changes that come along with rapid weight loss may result in feelings of anxiety.
- **Divorce:** Divorce can be a real concern after surgery. This is an emotional, life-changing process, something that you and your partner need to be prepared to go through together. Sometimes it is difficult for the spouse to accept the changes that the bariatric patient undergoes.
- **Addiction transfer:** Addiction to food is a legitimate reason why some people find themselves in need of bariatric surgery. Once the lifestyle changes have been made and food intake is restricted, some people find that they consciously or unconsciously transfer their addiction to food to something else such as alcohol or drugs.

The life changes that take place after surgery vary from patient to patient. These are just some of the changes you may experience.

As noted previously, to prepare for these changes, most surgeons will require you to undergo interviews and testing with a bariatric trained psychologist to help prepare you for your rapid weight loss and to help you through the emotions you may experience as a result of surgery.

Check with your surgeon and psychologist to see if it is possible to have your spouse, family or members of your support system sit in on some of the meetings and counseling sessions so everyone is involved and informed.

## Can an adolescent undergo bariatric surgery?

There is not necessarily an age requirement for bariatric surgery. In most cases, it is up to the surgeon to determine if an adolescent is mature enough to undergo the surgery. Usually, a psychologist will meet with the adolescent and their parents pre-surgery to make sure that it is the adolescent's desire to have the surgery and not something the parents are pushing on their child. Just like adults, the adolescent needs to be deemed physically and emotionally ready to handle the life-changing effects of bariatric surgery.

If you have additional questions about bariatric surgery, visit the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery's website at [ASMBS.org](http://ASMBS.org).

*\*St. Paul Surgeons and United Hospital are both nationally recognized as Bariatric Surgery Centers of Excellence by the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery.*

*\*\*Diet requirements will vary based upon individual patient needs and surgeon/dietician recommendations.*

*\*\*\*Patients are encouraged to eat three meals per day along with a planned, healthy snack.*