



FROM THE OFFICE OF DR.

# Bariatric surgery: Is it right for you?

More and more people who need to lose weight are having bariatric (weight-loss) surgery. This surgery is very effective, but it is serious business and it isn't for everybody.

Bariatric surgery makes you lose weight in one of three ways: by reducing the size of your stomach (so that you feel full after eating a small amount of food), by shortening your small intestine (so that you do not digest all of the food that you eat), or by a combination of the two. All three types should be considered only under certain conditions.

## To have this surgery, you must:

- Have a body mass index (BMI) of at least 40 or a BMI of at least 35 with obesity-related problems such as diabetes or high blood pressure. This roughly translates into about 100 pounds overweight for men and 80 pounds for women. To calculate your BMI, see <http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi/bmicalc.htm>.
- Have already tried to lose weight in a medical weight loss program, but without success.
- Be highly motivated to change your lifestyle after surgery. During the first month after surgery, you may have to follow a liquid diet. After that, you will work with dietitians to determine the best meal plan for your needs. You will also need to exercise regularly and take vitamin supplements daily for the rest of your life. Multiple follow-up visits with your primary care provider are necessary in the first year after surgery and then annually. Having a family or social contacts who can lend emotional support is also helpful.

## You should *not* have this surgery if you:

- Are too frail or sick, due to heart, lung, or liver problems.
- Have ongoing substance abuse problems or an unstable psychiatric illness.
- Wish to become pregnant soon after surgery. The rapid weight loss and nutritional deficiencies associated with bariatric surgery can make pregnancy harmful for the mother and developing baby. Physicians recommend waiting 18 months to 2 years after bariatric surgery before getting pregnant.

If you do not meet the criteria for bariatric surgery, ask your doctor for a referral to a medically supervised weight management program. In these programs, patients follow a very low calorie diet and also take a pill to block absorption of fat or to suppress appetite.



This information is provided by your physician and the *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine*. It is not designed to replace a physician's medical assessment and judgment.

This page may be reproduced noncommercially to share with patients. Any other reproduction is subject to *Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine* approval. Bulk color reprints available by calling 216-444-2661.

For patient information on hundreds of health topics, see the Patient Education and Health Information web site, [www.clevelandclinic.org/health](http://www.clevelandclinic.org/health)