

Weight-Loss Surgery: Separating Myths from Reality

The Myth: “I do not need to worry about changing my eating and activity habits before weight-loss surgery because I can just as easily change them after weight-loss surgery.”

The Reality: To successfully and healthfully lose weight after weight-loss surgery, you will need to learn much information and apply many new skills. For example, if you do not chew your food well, you can feel sick and vomit. You will also need to know which foods are low in sugar, low in fat, and high in protein. You will need to eat slowly, take vitamin and mineral supplements throughout the day, monitor your fluid intake and serving sizes, and so on. By incorporating some of these changes into your lifestyle before weight-loss surgery, you will smooth the way to success after surgery. Now is also the time to start addressing unhealthy behaviors that could limit your weight loss or even land you in the hospital after weight-loss surgery.

The Myth: “I won’t be able to eat sweets ever again.”

The Reality: People vary in how much sugar they can tolerate. You might be able to tolerate foods that contain excess sugar, but these foods will still provide empty calories. Develop tools to limit the amount of sweets you eat so you have more room for healthier foods.

The Myth: “After I get far enough out from surgery, I will not need vitamin and mineral supplements.”

The Reality: Most types of weight-loss surgery *permanently* affect your ability to absorb certain vitamin and minerals, which means you will need to take vitamin and mineral supplements for the rest of your life. (This does not apply to adjustable gastric band surgery.)

The Myth: “Calories don’t matter. I just need to get enough protein.”

The Reality: Initially after weight-loss surgery, one of your first concerns will be to get adequate protein. As more time passes, you will probably find it easier to get enough protein in your diet without having to rely on protein supplements.

However, it is always important to choose mostly from lean and low-fat protein sources and to realize that, in addition to getting enough protein, a well-balanced diet including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy while watching total calorie intake is important.

The Myth: “The fewer calories I eat, the more weight I will lose.”

The Reality: To a point, this is true. However, research has shown that people have the same amount of weight loss on an 800-calorie diet as on a 500-calorie diet. Consuming less than 500 calories can be counterproductive. In addition, some people who quit losing weight (plateau) on a severe calorie-restricted diet report that their weight loss resumes with the addition of a few hundred extra calories for a few days.

The Myth: “If I eat more protein than I need, I will lose more weight and less hair.”

The Reality: Again, this is true to a point. If you do not eat enough protein, your weight loss may slow and you may lose more hair.

However, there are other non-nutritional reasons for hair loss that can’t be avoided by adding more protein. Also, too much protein can be taxing on the bones and kidneys, may lead to dehydration, and can be an additional source of calories. The goal is to consume adequate protein and then to add foods from other food groups.

The Myth: “After I have my surgery, I can eat anything I want since I can only eat

very small amounts.”

The Reality: Soon after weight-loss surgery, people may not feel hunger and are satisfied with very small amounts of food. Weight loss during this early stage occurs even if people eat many calorie-dense foods, snack excessively, and do not exercise. However, over time, as hunger returns, people can eat larger amounts and tolerate a greater variety of foods.

At this point, reckless eating and physical activity habits will promote weight regain. It is crucial to use the early period after weight-loss surgery to lay the foundation of healthy eating and habits that will promote health and weight maintenance even after your body has adapted to your surgical tool.

The Myth: “I should eat my favorite foods now since I will never be able to eat them again after surgery.”

The Reality: Overindulging on favorite foods before surgery is known as “last supper syndrome.” However, the myth that some foods will be forever “off limits” after surgery is not true. Eventually, you will be able to eat many of your favorite foods, including the ones that made you gain weight in the first place. Also, overindulging before weight-loss surgery is not recommended. If you overindulge, you may increase your surgery risk by gaining weight, increasing your blood glucose (sugar) levels, and increasing your liver fat. Furthermore, by eating fatty and sugary foods, you are reinforcing problem behaviors. That is moving in the wrong direction right off the bat