



Psychological and Emotional Issues

All of the changes that occur after weight loss surgery can be very mentally challenging. Some of the changes can even be disturbing. Most morbidly obese patients spend their lives hidden from life. Their obesity is a buffer from the world and it is used as an insulator from the world. In some cases it provides protection from commitments, attention, sexual relationships and people in general. After surgery, that buffer slowly disappears and can create a vulnerability that most patients have not ever experienced. We recommend that you read the following keeping in mind that some, all or none of the issues will affect your lives. The main issue is to realize that changes do occur emotionally and you must be prepared to deal with the changes as they unfold. Even though most of the changes that are occurring are positive for you, you can experience negative issues as well. Some patients will undergo counseling for a time after surgery and is even encouraged with some patients. Individual counseling, group counseling, and support groups are recommended for patients that are experiencing difficulty with the changes. The following are issues that we have seen in some patients that have undergone weight loss surgery.

Depression

Patients have wanted to be thin most of their lives. Now that the weight is coming off, **being thin does not solve problems**. The patient is still the same person on the inside. Family members have not changed; a patient's job has not changed; being thin does not make your life perfect – it does however, change your health problems.

Depression is sometimes seen after weight loss surgery for many reasons. Just the fact that a patient has undergone major surgery is enough to create depression. However, there are definite reasons that can cause depression after surgery. I will discuss a few of those reasons. **Hormonal changes:** Hormonal changes occur from the fat that is burned as an energy source releasing estrogen into the bloodstream. This can create a hormonal surge in the body. **Emotional eaters:** If the patient was an emotional eater before surgery, the surgery takes away that outlet. The diet after surgery significantly changes and the patient can no longer use that avenue as an outlet for emotions. **Television:** The television is a huge source of depression after weight loss surgery. It seems that every commercial is centered on food!! Try not to spend a lot of time watching the television. Get active in projects and new hobbies instead.

New Attention

As patients begin to lose weight, they will discover they will receive attention that most are not accustomed to receiving. In our society, there is a lot of importance placed on physical appearance. Most advertising is based on sexual images. Again, as I mentioned earlier, fat can be insulation, in this case...from attention. As weight is lost, patients become more vulnerable to others and cannot hide behind the “shield” that they once held on to...this can be frightening. Members of the opposite sex begin to flirt with patients. If patients have been obese for all of their lives, this can be greatly misunderstood.

Relationship Problems/Divorce

There is a strong possibility that the significant other will have a difficult time coping with all of the changes that patients undergo. As patients lose weight and become healthier, their self-esteem and self-worth will improve. The patient becomes someone that the significant other has never seen before. The patient gains a new independence. You may try new activities, gain new hobbies and will be ever changing. It is natural the significant other may have feelings of insecurity. That person may react negatively and may become overly possessive or may push you away.

How Long Will It Take To Be Thin?

Most patients struggle with this question. They have weight loss surgery and expect the miracle that accompanies it overnight! The patient is still obese the day after surgery. Despite the fact that weight loss surgery is only a tool, the idea of having to watch what a patient eats can be very discouraging. Some patients believe that they have no active part in the changes and will do little to improve their overall health. Patients must understand that becoming obese did not occur overnight and that they must play an active role in overcoming old patterns and becoming healthy again.

Shopping For New Clothes/Body Image

Shopping for clothes can be very frustrating. Before surgery you know where to shop and what size you wear. As the weight and inches are lost, patients can become frustrated just finding a place to shop. The body is undergoing a rapid change. It takes time to get accustomed to these changes. We recommended that patients buy a few articles of clothing per season the first year after surgery due to the rapid size changes that the body undergoes. The clothes you buy this season most likely will be too large the following season. Often the supports groups will have clothing swaps. This is a great place to take your clothing that has outgrown you and it will provide a chance to obtain new clothing for yourself without the cost!



Your Spirituality and Emotional Health

At this point in your journey, you must realize that “weight loss surgery” is not going to solve all of your problems in your life. It will take care of your diseases; it will assist in increasing your self-esteem; it may even reduce your depression. It will not however, fix your life.

Incorporating fitness into your life is not enough. It is only one part of the equation for shaping a healthy life. Nurturing your emotions and your spirituality can have a profound affect your health.

Once the weight begins to “come off”, you will begin to understand that the emotional reasons you ate before surgery are not gone. They still reside in you and you will be driven by them. Connecting the stomach to your emotions is the single most difficult struggle that patients deal with after surgery. You cannot escape “who” you are. You must learn to join the two worlds – the obese and the thin. You must learn about the footsteps that have led you to the place you are right now and how to develop an alternative “map” to lead to a complete healthy life. This task is not easy and requires an incredible amount of work on your part so that you can finally be free and so that you do not run the risk of re-gaining weight. You must discover why you eat when you are not hungry. Why you eat from your emotions and not your stomach.

In order to know how to proceed, you must first take some time to see where you are...you cannot fix what it broken until you know what it is. You want to make sure this time that you do not fall back into the patterns that caused failure in the past. Your surgical procedure will do much of the weight loss in the first six months; however, there will come a time when the scales will tip and you will be in charge of yourself again. It is at this point you want to ensure you will know how to achieve success and not fail.

Too many patients believe that the surgery will take care of everything. They do not stop to think about what it will take to lose and maintain the weight. Most of you have lost hundreds of pounds over your lifetime. That part you have down...the part that is the most difficult is keeping it off. This is because you did not make a plan for when the weight came off...you did not deal with the reasons why you eat through emotions. Happiness comes from within, not from a number on a scale or the size of clothing. That is why you must go inside of yourself and deal with what causes you to cope and solve those issues.

There are many ways in which to deal with these emotions. You can ask for the assistance of a behavioral therapist and attend support groups.

Spiritual health, as mentioned before, can affect physical health and is an important aspect of your ability to care for yourself. By learning to love yourself, appreciate your life, feel grateful, and trust yourself, you will become a better person, friend, partner, parent, and member of the community.

Whether you practice your spirituality in a church or cathedral or on a mountaintop, you must take time to nurture your spirit. Get involved. Most religious organizations welcome visitors and newcomers; consider sampling other belief systems and find one

that is right for you or if you already have your religious organization, get involved and active within that community.

Turn off the television, enjoy the silence. Do not automatically turn on the television or radio as soon as you walk in the door. Without distractions, you can tune into yourself. Revel in the silence and enjoy that moment. Take care of yourself and remember to take one day at a time.

We also recommend that you begin a journal to assist you through this journey. It will assist you greatly to write down the changes and feelings that you will undergo these next few weeks and years. Keep a record of photos, measurements and turning points. Only share the journal if you wish. Be honest with your feelings. The changes will be tremendous.

