



MOUNT SINAI  
SCHOOL OF  
MEDICINE

# Weight Loss Surgery: The Basics

*Weight loss surgery has become remarkably popular during the last five years, primarily due to advances in minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery. This fact sheet provides an overview of this life-changing treatment that has helped many men and women achieve permanent weight loss.*

## What is weight loss surgery?

Weight loss surgery, or bariatric surgery, can help severely overweight individuals lose weight permanently. Bariatric procedures are not for everyone; they require a serious commitment to life-long change and health improvement. But for heavy people who cannot lose weight with supervised diet and exercise programs, these procedures may be the answer.

## Am I candidate for weight loss surgery?

To determine if you are a candidate for weight loss surgery, you must calculate your Body Mass Index, or BMI. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), you may qualify for weight loss surgery if your BMI is 40 or greater. Usually, this means you are at least 100 pounds overweight. You can use the following formula to determine your BMI:

$$\text{BMI} = \left( \frac{\text{weight in pounds}}{(\text{height in inches})^2} \right) \times 703$$

You can also use the BMI calculator on the website of the Mount Sinai Program for Surgical Weight Loss, [www.surgicallyslim.com](http://www.surgicallyslim.com).

Of course, the best way to determine candidacy is to schedule a consultation with one of our bariatric specialists.

## How does weight loss surgery work?

Bariatric surgery causes weight loss in the following ways:

**Restriction**—Restrictive procedures reduce the size of the stomach, so you feel full after eating a small meal. Smaller meals reduce calorie intake, which encourages the body to use the energy stored in fat cells and results in weight loss.

**Malabsorption**—Some operations bypass a section of the small intestine. This reduces the absorption of calories, which also contributes to weight loss.

**Hormonal changes**—Weight loss surgery reduces the secretion of hunger-causing hormones and decreases the sensation of hunger.

## What are the different weight loss operations?

At Mount Sinai, we perform three types of weight loss surgeries: the Roux-en-Y gastric bypass, the Lap Band®, and the biliopancreatic diversion with duodenal switch (BPD-DS).

**Roux-en-Y gastric bypass.** Usually referred to as the gastric bypass, this operation is the most common weight loss procedure. The surgeon creates a small pouch in the upper portion of the

stomach and attaches part of the small intestine directly to it. The small pouch restricts the amount of food you can eat before feeling full. Additionally, food bypasses between three to five feet of the small intestine, which reduces calorie absorption. Patients who have this procedure typically lose 50 to 75 percent of their excess weight.

**The Lap Band®.** The Lap Band® is an adjustable silicone rubber band that is wrapped around the upper part of the stomach, creating a small stomach pouch. Roughly the size of an egg, the pouch fills quickly after a small meal. After the operation, the surgeon can adjust the tightness of the band by injecting saline solution into a small access port under the skin. Individuals who opt for the Lap Band® often lose 40 to 50 percent, or more, of their excess weight.

**Biliopancreatic diversion with duodenal switch (BPD-DS).** The BPD-DS involves removing part of the stomach, along with bypassing the majority of the small intestine. The BPD-DS is the most extensive and least common of the three operations. This procedure uses less restriction than the gastric bypass but greater malabsorption. As with gastric bypass, patients usually lose between 50 to 75 percent of their excess weight.

## Does insurance cover weight loss surgery?

Severe obesity is not a cosmetic problem—it is a medical condition that contributes to many life-threatening diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke, and liver disease. As a result, many insurance companies cover this type of surgery for patients who meet nationally accepted criteria.

## What are the advantages of laparoscopic surgery?

Unlike traditional open surgery, laparoscopic surgery does not require a large incision. In laparoscopic surgery, the inside of the abdomen is visualized using a long, narrow surgical telescope. The surgical instruments, only ¼- to ½-inch in diameter, are placed through several additional, very small incisions.

With this approach, patients recover faster and feel less discomfort after surgery. The risk of many complications, such as infection or hernia formation, is reduced.

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For more information, please visit our website at  
[www.surgicallyslim.com](http://www.surgicallyslim.com)  
or schedule a consultation with Dorothy at  
(212) 241-5339