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For Immediate Release

THE SKINNY ON WEIGHT-LOSS SURGERY

Surgery not only helps shed pounds, but also provides health benefits

By Aley Tohamy, M.D., Chestnut Hill Hospital

Many of us have been on some type of diet in our lives. Some of us have spent our entire lives trying the latest fad diet, each time ending up right back where we started. And 90 percent of diets fail in the long run. So if you're looking for a new you in the New Year, weight loss surgery may be an answer.

More than 72 million Americans are obese or severely overweight. Each year, obesity causes at least 112,000 deaths in the United States, and it's associated with numerous health problems: Type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension, gallstones, liver disease, sleep apnea, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), heart failure, degenerative joint disease, birth defects, miscarriages, asthma, and cancer.

If you're more than 100 pounds over your ideal weight, you may benefit from weight-loss surgery. Weight-loss surgery – also known as bariatric surgery – once thought of as primarily a cosmetic procedure, can offer lifesaving health benefits. It's estimated that in 2008, approximately 220,000 people in the U.S. had weight-loss surgery.

Since 1960, adult Americans have increased average height by one inch and average weight by 25 pounds, according to The Obesity Society.

A 2004 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that bariatric surgery patients lost between 62 and 75 percent of their excess body weight. Beyond simple weight loss, there were significant improvements to chronic health conditions: 76.8 percent of bariatric surgery patients experienced remission of Type 2 diabetes; hypertension was eliminated in more than 61 percent of patients and significantly lowered in 78 percent; more than 70 percent experienced a drop in cholesterol levels; and sleep apnea was eliminated in more than 85 percent of patients.

There are various types of bariatric surgeries:

- **Roux-en-Y gastric bypass** is the most common bariatric surgery, accounting for about 80 percent of all weight-loss surgeries. Surgeons create a small gastric pouch to reduce food intake. They then attach a Y-shaped section of the small intestine to the pouch to allow food to bypass the lower stomach and parts of the intestine. The procedure is performed with a laparoscope through several small incisions.

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- **Adjustable gastric banding or Lap Banding** is the second most common bariatric surgery, representing 15 to 20 percent of all weight-loss surgeries. Surgeons place a band around the upper stomach with a laparoscope, limiting food intake to 1 – 3 ounces. The band can be tightened or loosened over time to change the passage’s size. This procedure generally results in less weight loss than a gastric bypass, but is also reversible.
- **Gastric sleeve or vertical sleeve** restricts food intake, by removing most of the stomach. The remaining stomach “sleeve” will hold about one-fourth of a cup of liquid, and over time, the stomach can expand to hold approximately one cup of food. This procedure is not reversible.

If you’re considering bariatric surgery, keep in mind that surgical candidates must:

- have a body mass index (BMI, the ratio of your weight adjusted for your height) of 40 or more, or be at least 100 pounds overweight
- have at least two significant associated illnesses, such as diabetes, hypertension, arthritis or sleep apnea, if your BMI is between 35 and 40
- be between ages 18 and 65
- have no drug or alcohol dependency, or have at least one year of sobriety
- have documented attempts to lose weight medically
- be a nonsmoker for at least two months
- be committed to improving your health and lifestyle

Chestnut Hill Hospital will host a FREE one-hour information session on bariatric surgery on Wednesday, January 12; 6 p.m., in the Board Room. Call 215-248-8520 to register.

The Metabolic and Weight Loss Surgery Program at Chestnut Hill Hospital offers gastric bypass, Lap band and sleeve procedures. Our team includes a dedicated bariatric coordinator, registered dietician, bariatric unit and surgical team. Also offered are monthly support groups, a one-hour personal session with a registered dietician, and several classes to educate patients in new eating habits, exercise and nutrition.

As with any surgical procedure, bariatric surgery may present risks. Talk with your doctor about whether you’re a candidate for weight loss surgery and together, discuss the risks and benefits. Remember that you must be committed to maintaining a healthy lifestyle – including adopting very different eating habits and increased exercise – as well as nutritional counseling and lifelong medical follow-up, after surgery.

To learn more, visit www.hospitalname.com. Click on “Health Resources” and “Interactive Tools” and test your knowledge with “Obesity Basics: What is it? How is it Treated?”, “Weighty Questions,” “Fats Quiz,” or figure your body mass index with our Adult BMI calculator. You can also call 215-248-8520 to learn more about weight loss surgical options.

About the Author: Aley Tohamy, M.D., is director of the bariatric surgery program at Chestnut Hill Hospital. He is a University of Pittsburgh fellowship-trained surgeon specializing in metabolic syndrome, weight loss surgery and advanced laparoscopic surgery. He established the bariatric surgery program at Chestnut Hill Hospital in 2008 and has been implementing the latest techniques in surgery and management to improve clinical results for obese patients with medical co-morbidities.

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