

Bariatric surgery to the rescue of young obese people

Being overweight is no longer considered a cosmetic problem and is known to cause serious life threatening ailments. Young people struggling with obesity are looking to bariatric surgery to reclaim their life and to curb health issues.

For a person who would be breathless after walking a little distance and who has had to cope with various health issues from a tender age, being able to wear heels to a party and dance the night away without feeling tired or drained, is nothing short of a huge triumph.

Once struggling with a weight of 132 kgs and with high blood sugar levels, pain from rheumatoid arthritis, thyroid and hormone issues, Savita (name changed) could not even do regular daily activities and was embarrassed and frustrated at her condition. Now enjoying her new found freedom from the scourge of obesity, the 31-year-old's health has bounced back.

"Two months ago, when she found that she was not able to get up from her bed one day, because of her growing weight and health problems, she came to us for help. We advised her to undergo bariatric surgery. Now after two months, the result is there for everyone to see – Savita has lost 22 kgs post Bariatric (weight loss) surgery and feels light and energetic. Her blood sugar levels started dropping the day after the surgery itself and are back to normal, so she is no longer on her diabetes medication, which she was otherwise advised to take life-long. Her thyroid medication has also been reduced. This is a boon since uncontrolled diabetes would have exposed her to various related complications like high blood pressure, kidney failures, heart attacks, eye problems including blindness," says Dr Aashish Shah, Director Department of GI/Minimal access and Bariatric Surgery at Fortis Hospitals, who operated on Savita.

Obesity is now considered a killer lifestyle disease that needs to be addressed seriously as it is a risk factor for cardiac ailments, diabetes, sleep apnea, bone diseases, renal and reproductive health problems. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1.2 billion people worldwide are officially classified as overweight. In India more than three percent of the population is supposed to be obese. Major lifestyle changes and eating habits are having an impact early in life and obesity issues often strike in the growing up years, as it did with Savita. For young people who are morbidly obese and as a result dealing with major illnesses, Bariatric (weight loss) surgery is coming to the rescue to lead a normal life.

"I was quite sporty in my childhood but started putting on weight in my teenage

years and it kept on increasing. With it came the other health problems - diabetes, thyroid issues, arthritis and so on. If I stood for some time my feet would start hurting and I could never wear heels. Dieting and exercise didn't help but for many years I did not seek medical help because I could not accept that my weight was not going to come down through conventional measures. But my condition got worse and I decided on weight-loss surgery, which has changed my life. I have dropped four sizes and my energy levels have increased. I can take part in all activities like everyone else," says Savita.

Young television artiste Vincent agrees wholeheartedly. His life has taken a turn for the better since he opted for bariatric surgery as a last resort, after endless months in the



gym and dieting yielded no results. As a teenager, he gradually gained weight and became morbidly obese, with the problem having a psychological impact on him. Tipping the scales at 164 kgs, the young man dreaded going to college because he was bullied and made fun of. The 26-year-old, who works in the film and television industry found it all extremely traumatic and that's when he sought help from Dr Aashish Shah to reduce his weight.

"After a thorough evaluation that concluded that Bariatric (weight loss) surgery was his only option, he was advised to undergo the surgery. In a span of just six months after the operation, Vincent's weight came down to 95 kgs, which is a drop of 69 kgs. Earlier any physical activity was an impossible task for him but now he is swimming and cycling regularly and is on a healthy diet of chapattis, fresh veggies and lemon juice to maintain his ideal weight," adds Dr Shah.

As for Vincent, he has never been happier because the attention he gets now is mostly positive.

WHAT IS BARIATRIC SURGERY?

Bariatric surgery is the medical term for

weight reducing surgery performed on patients who are obese. According to MOH guidelines, anyone with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of more than 37.5 or with BMI > 32.5 with related conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, infertility, arthritis, sleep apnea and depression is eligible to undergo Bariatric (weight loss) surgery in India.

It is recommended for people who have tried all other methods of weight management and failed, and who are not able to carry out normal daily activities because of being overweight and have medical conditions such as diabetes, sleep apnea, hypertension, breathlessness, arthritis, infertility, dyslipidemia, cholesterol.

There are different types of bariatric surgery performed regularly by doctors –

1. Gastric Bypass surgery - This involves re-routing the small intestines to a small stomach pouch.

2. Sleeve gastrectomy - An irreversible surgery wherein approximately 70-80% of the stomach is removed and remaining portion is stapled form a tube or sleeve. The reduced stomach size limits food intake.

3. Gastric Banding - reduces the size of the stomach with an implanted medical device, which looks like an elastic band.

Gastric bypass surgery and sleeve gastrectomy also significantly reverse or decrease obesity related diabetes, sleep apnea, hypertension, breathlessness, arthritis, infertility, dyslipidemia, cholesterol.

These days all bariatric procedures are done through laparoscopic procedures (minimal access surgery). A recent modification of laparoscopic technique is the single incision surgery. Here, instead of multiple holes on the abdominal wall, only a single hole measuring about 25 mm is made through the belly button. This gives a cosmetically superior result with an almost invisible scar.

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