

Understanding the of Bariatric Surgery

Risks



By Lloyd Stegemann, MD

If you listen to the popular press, you would think that every weight-loss patient has a complication or dies after weight-loss surgery. The truth of the matter is that the majority of people come through their operation with few to no complications. Even though the number of bariatric surgeries being performed is increasing exponentially, it has never been safer to undergo a weight-loss operation.

It is important to understand, however, that there are real risks when undergoing a major operation like weight-loss surgery. This article discusses some of the common risks facing patients undergoing weight-loss surgery.

Let's start out with the worst possible complication: death. Despite what the media would have you believe, death is actually unusual after weight-loss surgery. If you look at the most popular weight-loss operations, the death rates are: Adjustable Gastric Banding 0.1 percent, Gastric Bypass 0.5 percent, and Biliopancreatic Diversion 1.1 percent. In many experienced programs, the rates are even lower. While the risk of death is very low, it is very real and must be seriously considered when contemplating weight-loss surgery. It is vital that each individual considering weight-loss surgery ask themselves the question, "Does my weight problem concern me enough that I am willing to put my life on the line to get it under control?"

With any major surgery there are risks while you are in the hospital and after you have gone home. The tables, located on page 8, list some of the more common complications that can occur during these time frames.

There are additional risks that are specific to a particular weight-loss operation and are beyond the scope of this article. You should talk to your surgeon about specific risks once you have decided which operation is right for you. Keep in mind that the medical problems you bring into the operating room also affect your level of risk (i.e. the "sicker" you are the riskier the weight-loss surgery).

On a more positive note, there are some things that you can do before your operation to minimize your risk. One of the most important things you can do is to select an experienced weight-loss surgeon with an established, multi-disciplinary

program. Second, if you are a smoker, stop immediately. Smoking impacts multiple organ systems and has serious effects on the lungs and on wound healing. Most weight-loss programs will want you to lose some weight prior to weight-loss surgery. The 10-20 pounds that most programs want you to lose may not seem like much, but for your surgeon it makes a world of difference, especially if they are performing your surgery laparoscopically (through small incisions). Increasing your daily activity and modifying your diet prior to your weight-loss operation will also have a positive impact.

Finally, when considering the risks of weight-loss surgery, one must consider the risks of not having weight-loss surgery. Clearly there are a host of risks that come along with being morbidly obese including such life threatening problems as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and sleep apnea. Morbid obesity also significantly impacts the quality of life of individuals by decreasing energy, stamina and mobility.

While weight-loss surgery is safer than it ever has been, it is still a major operation, which has inherent risks associated with it. Although the majority of patients will make it through their operation with minimal to no long-term problems, there is a small minority of patients that will have significant long-term problems. Each individual must decide if the risks of surgery are less than the risks of continuing to live with their morbid obesity.

About the Author:

Lloyd Stegemann, MD, is a bariatric surgeon in private practice with New Dimensions Weight Loss Surgery in San Antonio, Texas. He is active in patient advocacy on the state and national level. He can be contacted at www.ndwls.com. Dr. Stegemann is a member of the Obesity Action Coalition.

Risks of Bariatric Surgery

Operating Room Risks

- Bleeding
- Injury to organs
- Problems with anesthesia

Hospital Stay Risks

- Wound infection
- Pneumonia
- Urinary tract infection
- Blood clots in the legs
- Blood clots in the lung
- Leak from bowel connections
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Kidney problems

At Home Risks-Early

- Dehydration
- Ulcer
- Stenosis (narrowing)
- Kidney stones
- Prolonged nausea

Editors Note: This article is provided to illustrate the risks of bariatric surgery. It is important to note that there are risks involved with bariatric surgery, as well as any other surgical procedure. Before making a treatment decision, it is important to discuss these risks with your physician and/or surgeon. The OAC also encourages patients to discuss these risks with their family members.

OAC membership

Membership in the Obesity Action Coalition allows the patient voice to be heard in the fight against obesity. By building a coalition of members, consisting of patients, family members and professionals, the OAC strives to educate and advocate on behalf of the millions who are affected by obesity. Membership benefits include:

- Official charter membership card/certificate
- Subscription to *Obesity Action Alert* - a monthly e-newsletter
- OAC News - the OAC's quarterly newsletter
- Representation through advocacy in addition to information on advocacy issues concerning patients

Membership Application

Name: _____

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- Patient/Family Member: \$20
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- Surgeon Member: \$150
- Institutional Member: \$500 (Bariatric surgery centers, weight-loss management centers, etc.)*
- Chairman's Council: \$1,000 and up*

* Different benefits apply. Contact the OAC National Office for more info.

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Or fax to: (813) 873-7838 If you have questions about OAC membership, please contact the National Office at (800) 717-3117.



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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