Dear Doctor



Am I Losing Weight Fast Enough Post-surgery?

Answer Provided by
Lloyd Stegemann, MD, FASMBS

People have bariatric surgery to lose weight and get healthier. The question is, how much weight will they lose, and how fast will they lose it?

These are difficult questions to answer because each patient is a little different. While there is a lot of research teaching us about the average amount of weight loss after surgery, there isn't much research to guide us in terms of how fast the weight will come off. There are, however, some general rules that, in my experience, hold true for most patients.

Total Weight Loss

The main factor that will determine how much weight you will lose after bariatric surgery is the surgical procedure that you choose. Each of the bariatric surgical procedures has a different amount of weight loss that is expected after the operation. For most patients, this weight loss will happen in the first year after their operation, and then the weight loss will stop. Usually, when we talk about weight loss with diet, exercise, medications, etc., we describe the amount of weight loss as the "Percent Total Body Weight Loss."



Calculating "Percent Total Body Weight Loss"

$$\left(\frac{\text{Weight before Surgery} - \text{Current Weight}}{\text{Weight before Surgery}}\right) \times 100$$

Calculating "Excess Weight Loss"

$$\left(\text{Weight before Surgery} - \text{Ideal Weight}\right)$$

Calculating "Weight Loss after Bariatric Surgery"

$$\left(\frac{\text{Weight before Surgery} - \text{Current Weight}}{\text{Excess Weight}}\right) \times 100$$

Who knew determining weight loss after bariatric surgery would take a math degree from MIT! Don't worry; we'll make it really simple.

Here is the expected percentage of Excess Weight Loss (% EWL) and the percentage of Total Body Weight Loss (% TBWL) for each of the major procedures done in the United States:

- Gastric Banding Surgery: 50% EWL (25% TBWL)
- Gastric Sleeve: 60% EWL (30% TBWL)
- Gastric Bypass: 70% EWL (35% TBWL)
- Duodenal Switch: 80% EWL (40% TBWL)

For example, if a person weighed 300 lbs. before surgery, they can expect the following weight loss with these different procedures:

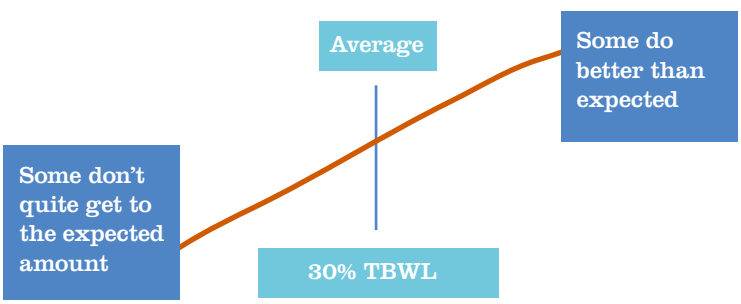
- Gastric Banding Surgery: 75 lbs.
- Gastric Sleeve: 90 lbs.
- Gastric Bypass: 105 lbs.
- Duodenal Switch: 120 lbs.

Everyone's Weight Loss is Different

It is important to keep in mind that these weight loss numbers are just averages. For example, if 100 patients had a gastric sleeve procedure, and we tracked the weight loss for each individual, the graph showing their weight loss results would look like the graph below. Most would lose around 30% of their total body weight, but some would lose a little more than that, and some wouldn't lose quite that much.

Does that mean the ones who don't lose as much as expected are "failures?" Absolutely not! Generally, the ones who lose a little more than expected aren't doing anything different than the ones who don't lose quite as much as expected. Each individual will lose weight differently after bariatric surgery. We just don't know who will respond best to which operation. The good news is that with any bariatric surgery procedure, most people will lose enough weight to see significant improvement in their health and quality of life, even if they don't lose as much as we would "expect!"

Average Weight Loss after Bariatric Surgery



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Woman's Hospital

Platinum: $100,000 and up
Gold: $50,000 - $99,999
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Bronze: $5,000 - $9,999
Patron: $1,000 - $4,999

List as of 4/07/2020

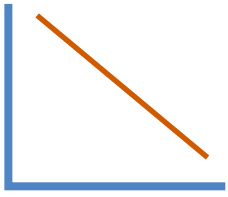
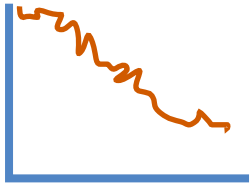
How Fast Will I Lose the Weight?

This is where we don't have much research to guide us. Here is what I have found after treating thousands of bariatric surgery patients. First and foremost, if you weigh yourself every day in the first year after surgery, you are going to go nuts! I encourage you to put the scale away and bring it out only once a week during the first year after surgery. For the first three months after surgery, this is the rate at which most patients lose weight:

Gastric Banding: Average 1 – 2 lbs. a week
Gastric Sleeve: Average of 3 – 5 lbs. a week
Gastric Bypass: Average of 5 – 7 lbs. a week
Duodenal Switch: Average of 6 – 8 lbs. a week

Looking at Weight Loss Patterns after Bariatric Surgery

After surgery, your weight will:

Not come down like this:	But more like this:
	

Don't Get Defeated

Some days you may do everything right but you will gain a pound, which is why you'll go crazy if you weigh yourself daily! That is just the way that our bodies shed weight. To avoid getting frustrated, it is important to look at the weight you were before surgery and then divide that by the number of weeks you are out from surgery. For example, let's say you had gastric bypass four weeks ago and your weight loss followed the below pattern.

Week 1: lost 13 lbs.
Week 2: lost 5 lbs.
Week 3: lost 8 lbs.
Week 4: lost 2 lbs.

These results mean you have lost a total of 28 lbs. in four weeks and are averaging a weight loss of seven lbs. a week. According to the information listed previously for gastric weight loss, you're right on track. If your weight loss is way above or way below the averages listed, then I would recommend you reach out to your bariatric program for guidance.

The "Second Half" of Weight Loss

Generally, patients will lose half of the weight they are going to lose in the first three months after surgery. My experience has been that the amount of weight the patient loses in the first three months after surgery will usually double by the time a year has passed.

For example:

If you lost 40 lbs. in the first three months after your operation, then in general, you should lose another 40 lbs. throughout the next nine months. This means you will have lost 80 lbs. in the first year after surgery.

During the "second half" of the weight loss period, you will often encounter times where your weight stays stable. This is commonly referred to as a weight plateau. However, you will notice that you are still losing inches and your clothes will fit looser.

In the "second half" of your weight loss, the weight also seems to come off in "chunks." Your weight may be stable for a very long time, drop by five pounds, become stable again, drop by three pounds…etc. When you are in the plateau phase, it can be frustrating. This is a perfect opportunity to focus on the healthy habits you are working on that will help you maintain the weight loss long term. It is important that you also reflect on how much better you feel overall as your health steadily improves. For most patients, their weight will reach its lowest point one year after surgery.

Conclusion

After bariatric surgery, it is virtually impossible for a patient not to lose weight due to all of the neural, chemical, hormonal and psychological changes that occur from the operation. However, the rate of weight loss and the amount of weight loss a patient will experience will vary between individuals. I believe the most important thing to emphasize is that patients should lose weight in a safe, healthy way that will help them keep the weight off forever. I encourage you to focus on developing healthier habits for eating, exercising, sleeping and stress management in the first year after surgery. If you do those things, the weight will take care of itself.

About the Author:
Lloyd Stegemann, MD, FASMBS, is a bariatric surgeon in Corpus Christi, TX, and an OAC National Board of Directors member. He also serves on the OAC Access to Care Committee and is a passionate advocate for universal access to bariatric surgery.

OAC
Obesity Action Coalition

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.



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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

JOIN TODAY: GO TO OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN

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