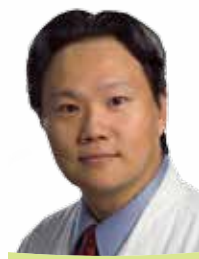


Losing Weight, Gaining Health: Is Bariatric Surgery Right For You?

In high school, Cynthia Meekins weighed 110 pounds. But in her early 30s, her sedentary lifestyle began weighing on her, literally. By her mid 40s, she'd gained 137 pounds, and the weight was taking a toll on her 5'2" frame. She suffered from hypertension, high cholesterol, pre-diabetes, fatigue, and acid reflux.



"I was starting to lose my mobility; I felt like my body was failing me," she remembers. Over the years, she'd tried numerous diets, all of which worked only temporarily. Then, three years ago, a co-worker recommended she see Dr. Wai Yip Chau, (pictured left), a board certified bariatric surgeon at University Medical Center of Princeton at Plainsboro (UMCPP), about bariatric (weight loss) surgery.



After consulting with Dr. Chau, she decided to undergo vertical sleeve gastrectomy, a relatively new procedure that reduces the size of the stomach by about 85 percent. She's now down to 125 pounds and feeling great. "This surgery may not be the right choice for everyone," she says, "but it was the right choice for me."

If you're wondering whether sleeve gastrectomy might be an option for you, consider the following:

How much will I lose?

The average weight loss after sleeve gastrectomy is between 55 and 70 percent of excess body weight. That compares with an average of 75 percent with gastric bypass and 50 percent with laparoscopic gastric banding (lap banding), the two most common bariatric surgeries.

What are the risks?

Standard post-operative complications can occur, but the most common risk of sleeve gastrectomy is acid reflux. Gastric bypass, on the other hand, carries

more serious late risks, including ulcers, intestinal obstruction, and malabsorption of nutrients. You should discuss in detail all potential risks with your surgeon.

What are the benefits?

In addition to weight loss, sleeve gastrectomy generally leads to an early resolution of type-2 diabetes. And like other bariatric procedures, it results in lowered blood pressure and cholesterol and resolves weight-associated problems like reflux and hip and knee pain.

Another benefit is that Dr. Chau offers several insurance options to patients, including commercial insurance plans like Aetna, Amerihealth, Cigna, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of NJ, Oxford and United Healthcare, with additional plans being added. Plus, older adults who are obese and meet additional criteria may now qualify for Medicare coverage.

Today, Cynthia Meekins is no longer pre-diabetic; her cholesterol is low; and her reflux is gone. She stresses that maintaining her health takes dedication—she eats several small, nutritious meals a day and works out regularly. "Yes, I lost a lot of weight from the surgery," she says, "but thanks to Dr. Chau and the staff at UMCPP, I've also gained immeasurable, lifelong benefits."



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