

Section 6

Emotional Health and Support

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

How Should You FEEL Before Gastric Bypass Surgery:

Make the commitment

- YOU must make a commitment to immediate short-term changes.
- YOU must make a commitment to long-term, lifelong changes.
- YOU must be willing to exercise.
- YOU must be willing change your eating patterns.
- YOU must be willing find new ways of managing stress and life's problems.
- YOU must be willing develop new coping skills.
- YOU must be willing increase your peer and family support.
- YOU must commit extra time to optimize your success.
- YOU must commit extra finances to optimize your success.
- YOU must continue to educate yourself.

Be realistic

- 1 This is not a magic pill – it takes a lot of work.
2. The surgery offers a **window of opportunity** to lose weight and make the necessary lifestyle changes needed.
- 3 This window may last one or two years.
4. If you do not make the necessary lifestyle changes, you will regain the weight.
5. If you DO make the necessary lifestyle changes and stick to them for the rest of your life, you WILL keep most of the extra weight off for the rest of your life.

Change begins today!

To lose 10% of your weight before surgery, you must change your eating habits and increase your activity. Besides making the surgery safer, it is important psychologically;

Getting used to the new behavior changes before surgery reduces the possibility of feeling overwhelmed or depressed/anxious after.

You need to set up a support system today: friends and/or family, plus attendance at a support group meeting. They will teach you how to deal with feelings differently.

.When you are overwhelmed with different feelings after surgery, you will have people you already know to turn to.

How Should You FEEL After Gastric Bypass Surgery?

Euphoria

There may be an initial euphoria after the surgery when you begin to lose weight very quickly. But when the rate of weight loss slows down (usually after 12-18 months), the euphoria ends and negative feelings may emerge. This makes it essential that you have established healthy lifestyle changes beforehand.

Feeling deprived

After a while, you may feel angry or deprived that you can't eat what others eat, and you can't eat or drink the way you used to. You won't be able to use food and drink the way you did in the past to handle your feelings about life's problems (e.g. to comfort yourself, to deal with stress, to manage or suppress uncomfortable feelings). This makes it all the more important that you establish new ways of dealing with stress – before the surgery.

Immediately after the surgery you will find that if you eat the wrong kinds of food or too much of any food, you will become sick as a result. After a year or two, you may find that you CAN eat more, and a wider variety of foods, some of which are high-calorie foods. It can be even more frustrating knowing that you CAN eat those foods but that if you do, you'll gain back the weight. It's vital that you have established healthy behavioral changes – eating patterns, exercise, ways to deal with stress – so that if you 'slip' and gain back some weight, you can immediately self-correct by returning to your healthy behaviors.

Physical changes

You may be happy with the weight loss and your improved health, but not the way your body looks. (i.e. your face may have wrinkles and look older; the skin on your arms, breasts and stomach will sag. You may have to wear a girdle to hold up your stomach to prevent it sagging over your thighs and causing sores.) Kaiser may not always pay for the surgery to correct these problems.

Unwanted attention

Having a smaller body may result in getting more attention from others. On the one hand it may feel good, but it might also feel scary. For women, attention from men may bring up feelings of vulnerability or anxiety. As you lose weight, you may take more interest in your appearance: you may buy new clothes and begin to look very different. People close to you may feel threatened if you become more self-confident, assertive, or attractive. They may wish you were "like you used to be" – the "old you".

Support

You can't do this alone. You will need the support of friends and family. It is essential that you establish a support system before the surgery to help you through the lifestyle changes and to help you manage life's problems in a new way.

Attendance at a support group is extremely helpful. The support group offers an opportunity to be educated, prepare you for the difficult times, and have your questions answered. The other members can give you emotional support, and you can compare notes with them about their surgery experiences and how they are adapting to the new lifestyle.

Also, feel free to access psychological services offered by Kaiser for support or psychotherapy. Services are offered in Medicine, Health Education and the Department of Psychiatry.

The Importance of Support Groups: A Personal Perspective

Making the choice to have Gastric Bypass surgery is a life long commitment. You will evolve out of this experience a new person. When I made the decision four years ago to take this journey, I had no idea about the profound effect it would have on my life. This journey gives you the opportunity to learn more about yourself than you would ever think possible. Some of those experiences can be joyful and some can be painful. With self-discovery you will start to learn why you've struggled with food in your life.

Getting the proper support is the key to your long-term success. You will need support from friends, family, co-workers and your community. But, most vital is from people who know the struggles you are encountering. Only they can see the path that you are on and know the demons and restrictions that stand in your way.

I would have never admitted to anyone that I had an eating disorder prior to my surgery. I was simply one of those people with a very bad metabolism. Of course I would have done or said anything I thought would improve my chance of getting a surgery date. It took my about a year after my operation before I could truly admit to myself that I had had a problem with food. As much as we would like the surgery to re program our brains, it does not. That is where you are responsible. The surgeons can reprogram your stomach and digestive process. **But, only you have the power to reprogram you brain.**

Support groups come in many different forms; there are large groups, small more personal groups, and online groups. I have put together a list of a wide variety of support groups. This may just be a starting point for you to get your feet wet. From these groups you may find others that work better for you. The point is, to get started with something and make the commitment to follow it through, you will need support groups in the long run. Getting an early start in groups educates you too avoid many unnecessary pit falls. **When those pit falls do happen (and they will), you will have an established support system to turn to.**

Good Luck to all of you and remember to never forget where you came from; that is what makes all of you the wonderful people you've become.

Margee Wolosz

Pre-op weight 447lb.

2 year post-op weight 242lb.

205 lb. Gone but never forgotten!