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## Weight-loss surgery can help obese people get back on track with their diabetes

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Dr. Brett Cohen, chief of bariatric surgery at Memorial Regional Hospital and Memorial Hospital Pembroke, tends to a surgical case.

Linda Fairchild, 62, tried many diets — Atkins, Weight Watchers, liquid shakes —but she couldn't lose a single pound.

Diagnosed with pancreatitis in 2001 and showing symptoms of both Type 1 and 2 diabetes in 2003, Fairchild found herself taking an increasing amount of insulin every year, while gaining more weight than her 5-foot-3 body could handle.

At one point, she was taking two types of insulin into her body every day, Lantus for 120 units and NovoLog for 25 units, four times a day.

"It just kind of snowballed," said Fairchild, who weighed 160 pounds when she was diagnosed with diabetes and gained about 63 pounds.

She struggled walking to her car and her lower back was in constant pain.

“You get to a point where you get so disgusted when you try to do physical activity. You’re so heavy that your body can’t do it.”

Today Fairchild is 55 pounds lighter and can do physical activities like water volleyball because three months ago she had bariatric surgery at Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood. Bariatric surgery, weight-loss surgery that reduces the size of the stomach, removes a portion of it, or resections the small intestines to a small stomach pouch, has been shown to reverse diabetes. It can also help with other diseases associated with being overweight – high blood pressure, high cholesterol, sleep apnea and joint disease.

Unlike other medical weight loss programs, bariatric surgery works long-term.

“Bariatric surgery is designed to help people control their hunger, so that they can eat a lot less in a very comfortable environment,” said Dr. Brett Cohen, who performed the surgery on Fairchild and is chief of bariatric surgery at Memorial Regional Hospital and Memorial Hospital Pembroke.

According to Dr. Raul Rosenthal, director of the Bariatric and Metabolic Institute and department chair of general surgery at Cleveland Clinic Florida, obesity is a pandemic.

In the U.S. about 60 percent of the population is considered overweight and about 11 percent is considered obese or severely obese. Obesity is a gateway to many different types of diseases, including cancer.

“Every doctor should encourage their patients to try to lose weight by changing their diets and exercising,” Rosenthal said.

“Unfortunately, once you’re more than 100 pounds overweight, the likelihood that you will lose it and keep it down in two years is about 2 percent.”

Bariatric surgery has a low mortality rate and recent studies have shown that it can actually lower the mortality rate of certain diseases.

“Some studies showed that the death due to diabetes went down 92 percent in a group that underwent surgery,” said Dr. Nestor De la Cruz-Munoz, professor of surgery and co-director of the Center of Excellence for Laparoendoscopic and Minimally Invasive Surgery at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine.

“More endocrinologists are starting to recommend patients to do surgery, when a few years ago they were shying away from it.”

With bariatric surgery, however, people must change their lifestyle and take vitamins.

For Fairchild, it’s easy compared to taking all the insulin she did before. Today, she uses NovoLog once a day for 40 units. She has lost some hair as a side effect, but the procedure has changed her entire life.

“It’s a very positive experience for me,” said Fairchild, who is now “eating to live, instead of living to eat.”

“If the worst side effect for me is that I lose some hair, so be it. I’ll get a wig.”