

△ GENERAL INFORMATION

People are considered morbidly obese if they are two times, or 100 pounds over, their ideal weight. Up to 3 million Americans may be morbidly obese.

There can be several reasons for morbid obesity:

- One eats more food than is needed.
- We have more food and more fattening food available in the United States.
- In some people, there may be a genetic factor.
- A number of emotional problems may lead a person to eat far beyond the daily requirements.
- A lifestyle of no exercise or a physical problem of not being able to move about leads to too few calories being burned off.
- There may be a lack of a support system for a person who is trying to take off excess weight.

EFFECTS OF MORBID OBESITY

Morbid obesity can do damage to almost every organ in the body.

- The bones and joints wear down early because of the great weight they carry.
- A large amount of fat in the chest and breasts prevents the heart and lungs from working as they should. The oxygen in the blood is not at the best level.
- The heart is overworked.
- High blood pressure is three times more common. Stroke is seen more frequently.
- Diabetes is five times more common.
- Gallbladder disease is seen more frequently.
- There are social consequences: the person cannot get or hold a job.
- Driving an automobile becomes increasingly difficult.
- There is a higher divorce rate.
- There is difficulty in engaging in sports activities.
- There is difficulty in finding or being able to dress in tasteful clothing.
- The risk of breast cancer increases.
- There is a greater risk with any illness or operation.

COMMON HISTORY

- The person has been obese—a lot or a little—for many years, often since childhood. All types of appetite medicines, diets, exercise programs, and psychologic therapies have been tried, often more than once. They didn't help, or the person didn't stick with the plan.
- Often, doctors and patients believe that morbid obesity is due to hormone problems, and many tests are done to see if this is the cause. Actually, it rarely is the cause because hormone problems lead to weakness and cause the patient to look for help early before they become morbidly obese.

○ TREATMENT

- Most experts agree that many morbidly obese persons cannot be helped to cut down their appetite very much or for very long by diet or medicines.
- Weight loss requires behavioral changes or exercise.

- An operation is considered as a last resort. It is considered when everyone—especially the morbidly obese person—feels that something should be done.

PREOPERATIVE PREPARATION

- A number of preparations are done, including a psychotherapy evaluation and conferences with dietitians and an endocrinologist.
- You will have a thorough physical examination with special emphasis on your heart and lungs. Any medical problem will be taken care of as much as possible.
- Do not eat or drink anything for 8 hours before the operation.
- You may be given medicine that will make you feel drowsy before you are brought to the operating room.

□ OPERATION

- You will be asleep for the operation.
- The operation planned for you will be to place staples across some of the stomach to make it smaller. Also, the opening for food leaving the stomach will be made smaller (Fig. 1). This will make you feel full after a much smaller meal.
- If other important conditions are found, they will be taken care of; for example, if gallstones are found, the gallbladder will be removed.
- You will not receive a blood transfusion unless it is absolutely necessary.
- The operation usually takes 2 to 3 hours.

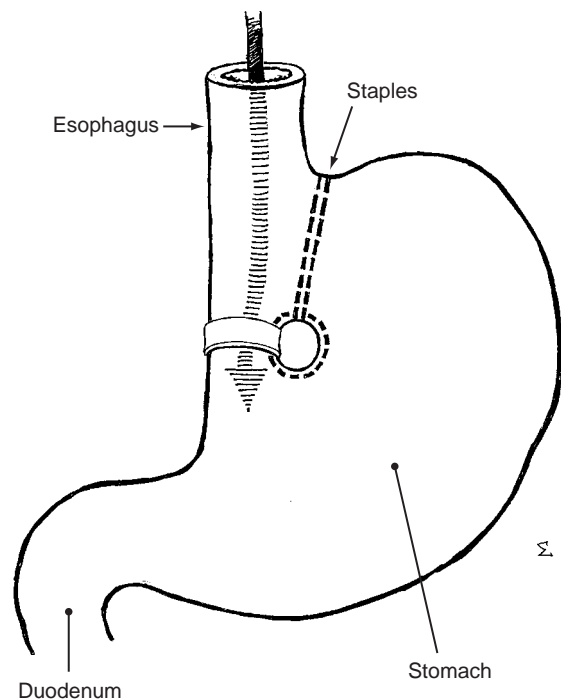


Figure 1. A common operation used in the surgical treatment of morbid obesity severely limits the amount of space available for food in the stomach and the speed at which the food can leave the stomach.

POSTOPERATIVE CARE

- You will be taken to the Surgical Care Unit, where the doctors and nurses are very experienced in taking care of patients with your condition. As soon as you are coming along well enough, you will be transferred to a regular hospital room.
- The evening after the surgery you will be helped to sit up in bed and on the next day to get out of bed.
- You will have a thin plastic tube in your nose. It goes down to your stomach to suck up the air you swallow. It will be removed within 2 to 3 days.
- You will be helped to arrange a diet schedule.
- As with any operation, complications are always possible. With your type of operation, complications can include wound infection; blood clots; infection inside the abdomen; swelling and blockage of the opening out of the stomach; the need to remove your spleen, which is right next to the stomach; and a hernia incision, among others. Rarely, the operation may not work because the staples across the stomach come loose, or the opening left may be too large and too much food can go into and out of the stomach. Possibly, the opening from the stomach is too small and the food cannot get out properly.
- You should be able to go home in 7 to 10 days.
- Arrangements will be made for your medicine, follow-up office visit, and stitch removal.

⊕ HOME CARE

- Continue with the program started while you were in the hospital.
- You may walk about as you wish, even climb stairs. Walking and otherwise moving about—in moderation—are good for your circulation, your breathing, and your muscle tone. Remain active as long as it doesn't hurt you or tire you.
- You may shower as you wish, with any dressings on or off.
 - There may be narrow strips of tape across the incision. It's all right if they get wet; they will be removed in the doctor's office.
 - After you dry yourself, replace any dressings with clean, dry ones.
- Eat *slowly*. Chew each bite of food 30 times. If you eat beef, first slice it into tiny pieces. Do not eat raw vegetables. Do not swallow big pills.
- Weight loss will not occur if you often drink high-calorie liquid or soft foods, which easily pass through the small opening of your stomach.

ℓ CALL OUR OFFICE IF

- You develop nausea or vomiting.
- You develop other new or unusual symptoms.
- The incision becomes red or swollen, or there is drainage from it.
- You develop a temperature higher than 100°F.
- You have any questions.