

Frequently Asked Questions With Dr. Sasse

QUESTION

Why is weight loss surgery so popular?

ANSWER

It is true that weight loss surgery is becoming an increasingly popular solution for many people across the country and around the world. Overall 180,000 people will have undergone weight loss surgery in the United States alone in 2007. By 2010, the number is expected to be over 350,000. I think the main reasons for this development are really twofold: 1) The condition of being significantly overweight is such a severe health problem and it is so difficult to lose the weight that people need help. 2) Modern minimally invasive weight loss surgery has become so effective and is so much less invasive now that it has truly emerged as an appealing and less daunting option. In most cases, the surgery can be done in under an hour and people can return to work and activities within a week or so. Increasingly, the surgery is being done on an outpatient basis.

QUESTION

Why is being overweight so bad for your health?

ANSWER

Being overweight is not a cosmetic issue or just a social consideration. The extra pounds bring with them an extraordinary amount of disease and disability, as well as a shortened lifespan. Certainly being serious overweight, 100 pounds or more over the ideal body weight, markedly reduces a person's health even at a young age. Overweight and obesity lead to dramatic increases in diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, sleeping disturbance, degenerative joint disease, heart attacks and strokes. In addition, weight gain is associated with the cellular biochemical pathways that lead to cancer. So we see that the rates of many of the most common forms of cancer are substantially higher in overweight people when compared to normal weight people. Even modest amounts of overweight, 10, 20, 30 pounds over ideal body weight, lead to marked increases in the risks of diabetes. So, it has been perhaps too long in coming, but the medical community and the scientific community have definitely awakened to what is the number one health problem in America. The more and more damaging effects of these extra pounds are continually being discovered and reported. So the rationale for losing weight effectively and keeping it off has never been stronger.

QUESTION

What is unique about outpatient weight loss surgery?

ANSWER

The most unique aspect of outpatient weight loss surgery is that a person can have a life changing procedure in the morning and be home by the afternoon. It is not simply the convenience, but it is what this change represents that has sparked the revolution in weight loss treatment. The fact that a solution that addresses such an important lifelong

problem can now be delivered in such a minimally invasive way that it does not require an inpatient hospital stay, entirely changes the way we think about weight loss surgery and about weight loss solutions. Laparoscopy or minimally invasive technical advances have transformed surgery of all kinds. With the great innovations of the pioneers in the bariatric surgical field, these technical advances have been successfully applied to weight loss surgical intervention. The introduction of the Lap Band, for example, represents a set of brilliant innovations that has led to a whole new option for successful long-term weight loss. And the fact that the medical device itself can be placed in a 30-minute outpatient procedure is truly revolutionary.

These advances and the fact that the minimally invasive techniques have dropped the procedures below the threshold of requiring hospital stays, means that many more people who could benefit from the surgery will, in fact, seek it out.

QUESTION

What are the risks of outpatient weight loss surgery?

ANSWER

The risks of outpatient weight loss surgery include potential problems with surgery, with anesthesia, and with the health conditions that a person has before they come in for surgery. The surgeries involve a laparoscopy, so there are five small ½ inch incisions made in the abdomen and the potential exists for complications such as infection or bleeding. Problems with anesthesia are rare, but sometimes people who are seriously overweight may have increased risk of breathing difficulties after emerging from anesthesia. There is a small risk, usually less than 1% in the hands of an experienced surgeon, that the procedure would have to be performed with an open technique, meaning a standard long abdominal incision would be required. There are also rare but potentially serious risks that are unique to the outpatient setting. Because people go home more rapidly than was historically the case, it is possible that some complications or problems may come to light after a person is home. These can run the gamut from infections to nausea or other side effects of medications, and blockages or problems with surgery that was performed. Studies show us that fewer people require hospital admission or return for admission after their surgery is performed in an outpatient setting than when it is performed in a hospital setting. Nevertheless, it is very important for people undergoing outpatient weight loss surgery to feel comfortable that they can contact the surgeon or his nursing staff to communicate any problems they feel they may be having after they have arrived at home.

QUESTION

So where do you see the future of weight loss surgery going?

ANSWER

That's really a great question. I see the future of weight loss surgery building upon the movement over the last decade toward less invasive but also more effective surgical interventions. We have seen that the skill level of trained bariatric surgeons has increased through the roof. Increasingly complex technical procedures can be performed

with a minimally invasive technique in the hands of the right doctors. I see the future bringing more and more highly skilled specialists to this field who can bring the less invasive techniques to more people. The American Society of Bariatric Surgery predicts continued growth of weight loss surgery and I frankly think the estimate of 320,000 or so cases in the year 2010 is probably an underestimate. I think the future is going to bring far more cases to the outpatient surgery arena. The Lap Band in particular is very well suited to an outpatient surgical approach and I think we are going to continue to see growth of outpatient surgical centers, outpatient weight loss surgery programs, and increasing growth in the Lap Band nationally and worldwide. We will also, I believe, see more people undergoing Roux-en-Y gastric bypass surgery or see gastrectomy type procedures in the outpatient setting, but these will be performed in far fewer numbers than the Lap Band procedure.

QUESTION

Where do you see the future of medical weight loss intervention?

ANSWER

The future for nonsurgical treatments for obesity and overweight is very bright, I believe. There is a heightened focus on this subject among the medical and scientific community. There is a great deal of research money and attention being given to the obesity epidemic. Physicians and organizations, such as the American Society of Bariatric Physicians, are increasing their dedication to finding comprehensive weight loss solutions that are successful. We are seeing multidisciplinary programs that involve a combination of behavior modification, exercise, meal replacement diet plans, and prescription medication come into use with increasing success. It definitely requires a concerted and integrated approach to fight this disease and I think we are seeing real progress on all fronts in the medical treatment of overweight and obesity.