Young Obese Patients May Benefit Most from Bariatric Procedures

Renowned bariatric surgeon Dr. Michael Feiz has some thoughts on perhaps the only reliably effective means we have of fighting a health scourge that is devastating the lives of countless young people. As the nationwide epidemic of morbid obesity continues to spread, more and more youths, including many teenagers, are seeking out such bariatric procedures as sleeve gastrectomy in their efforts to fight a condition with enormous health implications as well as social and psychological ramifications. The good news is that a recent small but detailed study from Nationwide Children's Hospital provided strong suggestions that procedures such as a gastric sleeve or lap band surgery may be likely to reverse conditions that are otherwise rare in young people but are often suffered by morbidly obese teens and children.

In one vivid example from the study, six of the teenagers in the study suffered from ischemia, insufficient blood flow to the heart. The problem is usually irreversible in middle-aged patients but the condition was, in fact, reversed in all six cases after bariatric procedures. As one of the finest doctors performing these procedures anywhere in the world, Dr. Feiz has seen many near-miracles in patients who have lost significant amounts of weight; he and his staff believe that, in many cases, young people may be especially likely to see these kinds of results. One of the primary impacts of youth on the body as a whole is greater resiliency, so it may be relatively unsurprising that more weight-related conditions can be cured more easily in youth than later on in life.

Moreover, the problem of very young people who are extremely obese appears to be increasing unimpeded. As of right now, approximately 17 percent of children and teens are considered obese. By some measures, as many as 4 percent of young people are regarded by doctors as extremely obese.

One possible reason for the success of such procedures undertaken by Dr. Feiz, such as the gastric sleeve in particular, is that it removes 75 to 85% of the stomach. The benefits appear to go beyond simply reducing the capacity of the stomach, because the area that is removed includes a section called the fundus. The fundus is where most of the ghrelin hormone is produced. This is the hormone responsible for feelings of hunger which appears to be produced excessively in overweight people and which actually increases when weight is lost through such traditional means as diet and exercise. The reduction in the body's production of the hormone is one reason that bariatric surgery appears to be an effective means of resolving significant obesity in many patients of all ages.

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