

# Surgeries help shed excess pounds

**People in need of weight-loss assistance turn to alternative methods**

BY ABBEY SNYDER  
Staff Reporter

Junior Michael Barber laughs along with "The Simpsons," has NOW CDs playing on his iPod and gets lost in the book "Eragon."

He also is one of many Americans battling his bulge with bariatric surgery. According to the American Society for Bariatric Surgery, an estimated 177,600 people in the U.S. with morbid obesity have had bariatric surgery.

In June, Barber underwent lap-band surgery, one of a few different surgeries that fall under the category of bariatric or weight-loss surgeries.

Barber said he struggled with weight-loss for years before deciding to get the lap-band procedure.

"I had been on diets for a long time, [like] the Atkins diet, the South Beach diet," he said. "And I had struggled for all of my life."

Barber said he chose to have the lap-band surgery as opposed to other bariatric surgeries (namely gastric by-

pass surgery, also called Roux en-Y) because it's much less invasive.

"[In gastric bypass] they actually go in and snip off a part of your stomach," he said. "It's just a whole lot of intrusive reworking of your gastrointestinal tract."

Barber said having the surgery has made him feel good both physically and mentally.

"I lost approximately 60 pounds, so that's a big difference for me," he said. "It's a good feeling and it really raises your self-esteem."

Dr. Chris Eagon, a bariatric surgeon with the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Mo., said gastric bypass is a more complicated form of bariatric surgery than the lap-band procedure.

"[Gastric bypass] involves dividing the stomach into two compartments," he said. "The lap-band is an implantable silicon device that is wrapped around the upper part of the stomach creating two different chambers ... which are connected by a channel passing through the center of the band."

Although in both surgeries patients lose weight, Eagon said that in gastric bypass, patients see a more drastic result.

"With the gastric bypass, patients

lose about 70 percent of their initial excess body weight in the first year, and they tend to regain about 15 percent of that weight loss in years two to five after the surgery," he said. "With an adjustable gastric band (lap-band), weight loss is not as dramatic. They lose about 40 percent of their initial excess body weight and lose another five percent to 10 percent over years two to three."

Eagon said the main reason people choose not to have bariatric surgery is because it's not covered by their insurance.

"It's an area of surgery that is still under some degree of skepticism on the part of insurance providers who do not believe that this is a medical necessity for people who are morbidly obese," he said. "In one [medical study] they estimated that for every 10,000 operations, 135 patients' lives were saved, so ... we ought to be doing a heck of a lot more operations to save these people and improve their lives."

Dr. Gemma Ciesemier, a family practice doctor in Lancaster, Mo., also underwent bariatric surgery two years ago. Unlike Barber, she opted for gastric bypass.

"I would do it over again if I had to, but hopefully I will never have to again," Ciesemier said. "However, some people do gain back all the weight they've lost."

To qualify for bariatric surgery, Ciesemier said patients must have a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 35 or more and have tried losing weight other ways.

"Gastric bypass surgery is a last resort in a sense," she said. "They need to have failed the other resorts of weight-loss."

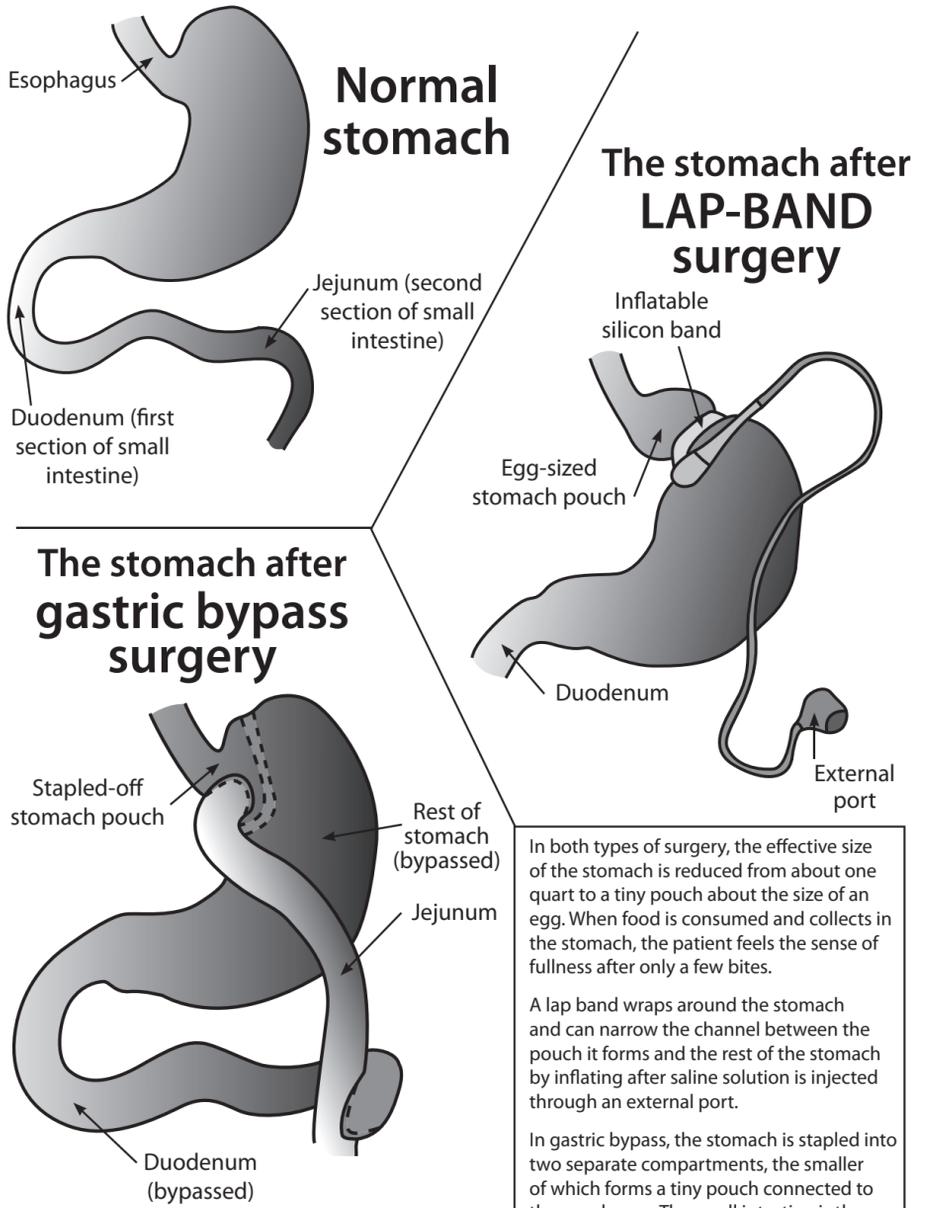
Ciesemier said that although there are risks associated with gastric bypass and other bariatric surgeries, often the benefits outweigh the risks.

"It's not an absolutely safe procedure, but ... in many patients who are morbidly obese, it's better than doing nothing at all," she said.

Barber said bariatric surgery is just the beginning in battling with weight-loss, and it's not merely a simple solution for those who don't want to work to lose weight.

"Bariatric surgery is not a fix-all for your weight problems," he said. "It's a tool, and you have to be willing to use that tool effectively to actually get where you want to get."

## Balancing the options of bariatric surgery:



In both types of surgery, the effective size of the stomach is reduced from about one quart to a tiny pouch about the size of an egg. When food is consumed and collects in the stomach, the patient feels the sense of fullness after only a few bites.

A lap band wraps around the stomach and can narrow the channel between the pouch it forms and the rest of the stomach by inflating after saline solution is injected through an external port.

In gastric bypass, the stomach is stapled into two separate compartments, the smaller of which forms a tiny pouch connected to the esophagus. The small intestine is then severed and rerouted so the rest of the stomach and the duodenum are bypassed.

Source: University of California, San Diego Medical Center Web site  
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