

Article in Newsday and Linda Fiveson's Response

Weight-loss surgery may reverse diabetes

March 26, 2012 by MARILYNN MARCHIONE. The Associated Press

CHICAGO -- New research gives clear proof that weight-loss surgery can reverse and possibly cure diabetes, and doctors say the operation should be offered sooner to more people with the disease -- not just as a last resort.

Two studies, released yesterday, are the first to compare stomach-reducing operations to medicines alone for "diabetes," Type 2 diabetes brought on by obesity. Millions have it and can't make enough insulin or use what they do make to process sugar from food.

Both studies found that surgery helped far more patients achieve normal blood-sugar levels than medicines alone did.

The results were dramatic: Some people were able to stop taking insulin as soon as three days after their operations. Cholesterol and other heart risk factors also greatly improved.

Doctors don't like to say "cure" because they can't promise a disease will never come back. But in one study, most surgery patients were able to stop all diabetes drugs and have their disease stay in remission for at least two years. None of those treated with medicines alone could do that.

"It is a major advance," said Dr. John Buse of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a diabetes expert who had no role in the studies. Buse said he often recommends surgery to obese patients who can't control blood sugar through medications, but many are leery of it.

Weight-loss surgery "has proven to be a very appropriate and excellent treatment for diabetes," said one study co-leader, Dr. Francesco Rubino, chief of diabetes surgery at New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center. "The most proper name for the surgery would be diabetes surgery."

The studies were published online by the New England Journal of Medicine, and the larger one was presented yesterday at an American College of Cardiology conference in Chicago.

Letter to the editor

Linda Fiveson

Diet, not surgery, for diabetes

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The article "Study: Weight-loss surgery may help reverse diabetes" [News, March 27] reports that two studies conclude surgery is more effective than medication for "diabetes." In the story, a physician describes stomach-reducing surgeries as "a very appropriate and excellent treatment for diabetes."

There was no mention of how changing the diet can control blood sugars. Is avoiding responsibility and finding a "quick fix" the answer to the oldest problem in the world? What about how food contributed to the problem in the first place?

There also was no mention of the inherent risks this surgery presents. The most severe include intestinal leaks, obstructions, infection, internal bleeding and even death in rare cases.

Submitting to surgery and giving up the hope of healthy eating seems like the easy way to end up accomplishing nothing. I work with many people who regain weight because processed foods are easier to digest than proteins. Shouldn't the responsibility fall upon us to change the way we eat?

Linda Fiveson, Syosset

Editor's note: The writer is a nutritionist.