

# What happens in bariatric surgery?

Senior consultant general surgeon Toh Bin Chet sheds light on this weight loss procedure and how it may help individuals with morbid obesity and metabolic diseases

According to the National Population Health Survey 2022, about one in nine Singapore residents aged 18 to 74 years were obese during the period of 2021 to 2022, with the highest percentage among adults aged 40 to 49 years old.

Dr Toh Bin Chet, senior consultant general surgeon at Mount Alvernia Hospital says bariatric surgery remains helpful for patients with morbid obesity, denoted by a body mass index (BMI) of 37.5 and above. It is also recommended for those with obesity-related health conditions and a BMI above 32.5. Here, he shares more on the benefits and risks of the procedure.

## Q What is bariatric metabolic surgery and when should it be considered?

Bariatric metabolic surgery is a surgical procedure performed for individuals who have obesity-related health conditions like Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia and fatty liver.

Its primary goal is to assist in weight loss and, in turn, improve or resolve obesity-related diseases. It may be considered when diet and exercise have failed to achieve significant weight loss and improve a person's health. In some instances, it can put metabolic disorders such as Type 2 diabetes into remission and significantly reduce the risk of heart disease and many obesity-related cancers.

## Q What are the possible risks and side effects of the surgery?

Today, most bariatric surgeries are minimally invasive and relatively safe. However, as with any surgery, there are inherent risks and potential side effects.

Some of the possible surgical risks include infection, bleeding, staple leaks, blood clots in legs and anastomotic stenosis, which is the narrowing of the new connection between the stomach pouch



Bariatric metabolic surgery may be a surgical option for morbidly obese patients who have not achieved significant weight loss through other means. PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

and small intestine. Common post-surgery side effects are nausea, vomiting, vitamin deficiencies and dumping syndrome, where stomach contents are emptied too quickly into the intestines.

It is crucial for individuals considering bariatric surgery to be aware of these risks and side effects, and discuss them thoroughly with their doctor.

## Q What is the recovery process like, and what can patients expect post-surgery?

Patients typically stay in hospital for one to five days after surgery, and should be able to return to work in about one to two weeks.

After surgery, there is a gradual progression from a liquid-only diet, to soft foods and then back to solids. This adjustment period typically takes about six to eight weeks, during which patients should take sips of fluid regularly throughout the day.

In the long term, patients will feel full much faster from eating a drastically reduced amount of food – about five tablespoons of solid food every meal. They should maintain a balanced diet and prioritise protein intake to preserve muscle mass. Vitamin supplements may also be prescribed for healthy bodily functions.

Patients will need to chew food completely and slow down between each mouthful. On top of this, avoid drinking about 30 minutes before and after meals, as the stomach may not have the capacity to accommodate both solid food and fluids together.



### Dr Toh Bin Chet

Senior consultant general surgeon  
 Upper gastrointestinal and bariatric surgery  
 Nexus Surgical  
 Medical Centre A #06-05  
 Mount Alvernia Hospital