

Bariatric Surgery

Obesity (a high degree of being overweight) affects millions of persons in the United States and around the world. Obesity is associated with diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, some types of cancer, and other medical problems. **Morbid obesity** is the medical term for extreme obesity. **Bariatrics** is the field of medicine that specializes in treating obesity. **Bariatric surgery** is a surgical subspecialty that performs operations to treat morbid obesity.

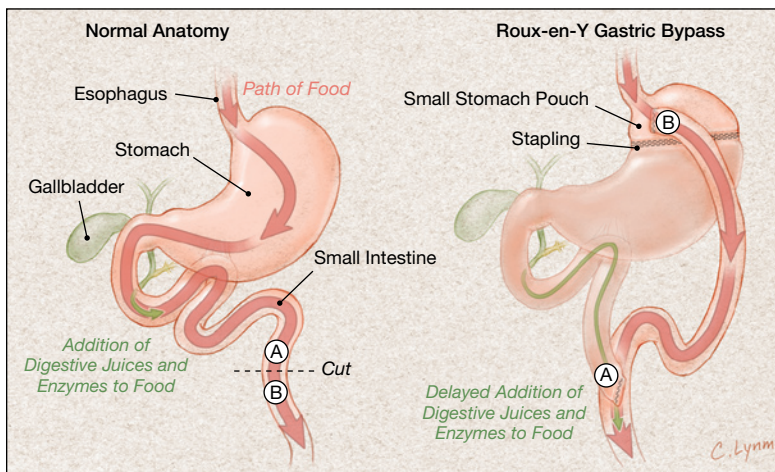
Because obesity is so difficult to treat in the long term, doctors and scientists are looking for ways to help persons who have this chronic disease. Bariatric surgery may be an option for some persons with severe obesity. The December 11, 2002, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about bariatric surgery.

WHAT IS OBESITY?

There is now a standard way to define overweight, obesity, and morbid obesity. The **body mass index (BMI)** is calculated based on a person's height and weight. The weight in kilograms (2.2 pounds per kilogram) is divided by the square of the height in meters (39.37 inches per meter). A BMI of 25 or more is considered overweight, 30 or more is considered obesity, and 40 or more, morbid obesity.

HOW DOES BARIATRIC SURGERY WORK?

There are several types of operations used by bariatric surgeons. All of these operations make the size of the stomach smaller. One example, the Roux-en-Y gastric bypass (named after Cesar Roux, a Swiss surgeon), is depicted below. Persons who have these operations must eat very small portions of food because the smaller stomach cannot hold much solid food.



WHEN SHOULD SURGERY BE CONSIDERED?

Bariatric surgery may be offered to patients who meet the criteria for morbid obesity (BMI of 40 or more) when medical treatments, including lifestyle changes involving healthy eating and exercise, are not effective. Bariatric surgery may be offered to less than morbidly obese persons (BMI of 35 to 40) if they have medical complications, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, that may be helped by surgical weight loss. Because bariatric surgery is a major operation, there are risks that must be taken into consideration. Each person must discuss individual risks and benefits with his or her doctor.

Janet Torpy, MD, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Society for Bariatric Surgery
352/331-4900
www.asbs.org
- American Society of Bariatric Physicians
303/770-2526
www.asbp.org
- American Obesity Organization
www.obesity.org
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Body Mass Index Web Calculator
www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/calc-bmi.htm

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on *JAMA*'s Web site at www.jama.com. They are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on obesity was published in the October 27, 1999, issue, one on healthy eating was published in the October 6, 1999, issue, and one on weight management was published in the January 20, 1999, issue.

Sources: US Department of Health and Human Services, American Society for Bariatric Surgery, American Society of Bariatric Physicians

