

'Morbid obesity is a deadly disease'

OBESITY HAS become a major health problem today, in fact it has acquired epidemic proportions, thanks to changing lifestyles. For the uninitiated obesity means problems related to excess body weight ranging from mild overweight to the morbidly obese. Efforts to treat morbid obesity through controlled diets, behavior modification and exercise programs which work very effectively in mildly obese people, are only temporarily successful with people who suffer from morbid obesity. So, obesity surgery is the only method by which long-term weight loss can be achieved in morbidly obese people. Seven to nine per cent people in India are overweight, of which 20 - 25% are morbidly obese which amounts to a staggering 2 - 2.5 million people. Padamshri **Dr Pradeep Chowbey**, chairman, department of minimal access surgery, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi, is one of the first to perform the laparoscopic cholecystectomy in North India. He has also performed over a 100 successful obesity surgeries. Here he talks to **Gunjan Sharma** about various issues related to obesity and obesity surgery, known as Bariatric surgery in medical terms.

Q: What exactly is morbid obesity?

A: Morbid obesity is a condition in which the Body Mass Index (BMI) of a person exceeds 40. Morbid obesity is a disease that leads to a number of deadly diseases like diabetes (Type 2), cardiac disorders, gallstones, high blood pressure, arthritis and even cancer. Unlike overweight, which can be managed by altering the lifestyle, morbid obesity needs treatment like any other disease. Now with the help of Bariatric surgery, we can successfully treat morbid obesity.

Q: What is Bariatric surgery?

A: Bariatric surgery is fat reducing surgery that helps you to lose weight by altering your body food digestion and absorption procedure. It is a minimal access surgery which can now also be done laproscopically. There are two modes in which this surgery can be done one is gastric banding in which a silicon band is placed around the uppermost part of the stomach making a small pouch. The second way is gastric bypass, in which a part of the stomach is stapled or divided to a small pouch. Then a long portion of intestine is attached to the stomach

to divert food content and stomach juices. Both the procedures shorten the stomach due to which a patient feels full faster.

Q: Doesn't restricting one's food intake reduce the general health and immunity of the person?



INTERVIEW

DR PRADEEP CHOWBEY

A: The less the body weight, the more is the person's power to fight with the disease. Fat is an immuno-suppressant. In this surgery, a person loses approximately one to two kilograms of weight every week till he attains the required weight and a healthy body.

Q: How is this surgery different from other fat reducing surgeries such as liposuction?

A: Liposuction is a cosmetic surgery, which is used to remove the excessive fat from a particular part of the body to give it a cosmetically acceptable look. The weight loss is temporary in such procedures. However, Bariatric surgery is a life saving surgery, which reduces weight from all over the body and the weight loss is permanent.

Q: Does the surgery leave scars? Does it require any kind of cosmetic treatment after surgery?

A: It leaves puncture marks, which are not very prominent. Sometimes, after a fat person loses weight, the abdominal skin sags. In this case, plastic surgery is done to remove the excess skin.

Q: How much does it cost?

A: Around Rs 50,000 to Rs 2.5 lakhs.

Q: What precautions does a patient have to take after the surgery?

A: The surgery does not have any side effects. It needs hospitalization for 24 to 48 hours and a patient can resume his or her work within a few days after the surgery. But a patient has to keep a constant watch on the calorie intake and the quality of food he eats. A person has to follow a regular exercise regimen to stay fit.

Q: Do you think people in our country are aware about this surgery?

A: Though the surgery is being performed for over four years, very few people are aware of it. People don't know that they have a permanent solution for morbid obesity that threatens their life.

Q: When can the obesity be best managed or controlled?

A: In a survey conducted in public schools, we found that 30 percent of the school children are obese. And the reasons for this obesity are unhealthy eating habits and a sedentary lifestyle. Obesity can be best managed at this level. For it, children should be encouraged to take up physical activities, should eat a balanced diet and participate in outdoor games.

Q: Is the surgery the only option for the morbidly obese people?

A: Yes. It is because the patients with morbid obesity do not respond to medical means of weight loss. Efforts to treat morbid obesity through controlled diets, behaviour modification and exercise programs are only temporarily successful. Morbid obesity is a deadly disease that needs immediate surgical treatment. ■