

Marco Adamo talks about how bariatric surgery is being used to tackle obesity

Losing weight: the 21st century method



LEIGHAN

TV PRESENTER Fern Britton's confession that she had had a gastric band fitted to control her weight sent shock waves around the media as she had championed more organic ways of shedding the pounds.

But a top surgeon believes that weight-loss or bariatric surgery will soon become one of the most common operations in the UK, as the nation's obesity epidemic worsens.

When an Enfield patient becomes obese and cannot lose weight by conventional means, they are referred to Marco Adamo and his team at University College London Hospital.

The five types of bariatric surgery available are risky – one in 200 patients die on the operating table or from complications stemming from the surgery. The procedures are therefore reserved for those with serious problems and the benefits, according to Mr Adamo, far outstrip the risks.

"Patients will lose three quarters of their excess weight – on average a stone a month and between six and 14 stone in total. They will need to

have a body mass index (weight measurement compared to height) of more

By *Mary McConnell*



than 40 or more than 35 and to be suffering from diabetes. A BMI between 18.5 and 25 is healthy.

"The bypass is the most common type as it achieves the greatest weight-loss in the shortest time. But it needs hard work and motivation. For every patient it is a life-long commitment."

ACCORDING to Mr Adamo, the three most common procedures are gastric bands, gastric bypasses and gastric sleeves.

A gastric band is fitted around the top of the stomach so that only a small amount of food can pass through before the patient starts to feel uncomfortable.

When a bypass operation is carried out, the stomach is reduced to the size of a golf ball. With a gastric sleeve part of the stomach is sectioned off so the size of the stomach is reduced by 85 per cent.

Mr Adamo is helped by a team of specialists, including

a psychiatrist, diabetes specialists, dedicated nurses and surgeons and patients have to undergo a series of assessments before the surgery can go ahead. UCH's team has an adolescent programme and can treat patients as young as 14.

Bariatric surgery began in the late 1960s but it became popular in the 1990s when obesity levels began to rise. Now 20 per cent of the population is obese, and up to 12 per cent are morbidly obese.

"More than 90 per cent of patients tell me it was the best thing they ever did and they wish they had done it sooner, even the people who suffered complications," he said. "The change in their appearance is so great that I often don't even recognise my own patients."

"This is life-saving surgery. For patients in their mid-forties with a BMI of 45 or more, their life expectancy is reduced by 15 years. When obesity levels are up to 20 per cent we can't blame individuals. It is a disease and it is as dangerous as cancer."

"There is a lot of prejudice and people, even some doctors, don't think that patients deserve to have the surgery. But I gave up cancer surgery to go into this and I don't regret it at all."

Yolanda's weight-loss op

BEFORE having a gastric bypass last October, 42-year-old Yolanda Doffman, of Howcroft Crescent, Finchley, always had a weight problem.

After Marco Adamo operated on her, she lost a staggering nine stone, slimming from a size 28 to a slender size ten.

"I have always been fat. As an adult I weighed between 13 and 21 stone and despite trying all sorts of diets and even slimming pills I only ever managed to lose a couple of stone here and there.



"When I was 30 I got divorced and then the weight just piled on. I was the unhappiest girl in the world and then I was diagnosed with diabetes and high cholesterol. I thought something has to change or I'll become ill."

"For the first couple of weeks I was on a diet of clear soup and then you can start introducing foods one by one. I am now down to 10 stone 3lbs. Anyone who tells you that they are happy being fat is lying – it is horrible."

