to your Health!

"Promoting Good Health Through Information"

Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System • Patient Education Newsletter • Spring 2005

# Is Weight Loss Surgery for Me?

*By Nina Bellatorre, RN, MS*

It seems as if everywhere you look today there is a news article about Weight Loss Surgery (also called Bariatric Surgery). What is this about? Who is a candidate? What do YOU need to do first?

## First, why would surgery be considered?

Weight Loss Surgery is a TOOL that is used in treating obesity. Obesity is measured by a formula called Body Mass Index (BMI). Just as you may know your blood pressure readings and cholesterol readings, you should know your BMI. A BMI between 18 and 25 is considered healthy. A BMI over 30 reflects obesity, and a BMI over 40 reflects severe or morbid obesity. Many studies have shown that obesity increases your chances of developing serious health problems such as: diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, acid reflux, and back or joint problems. Weight loss surgery should only be considered when supervised attempts at weight loss have not been successful.

The VA Palo Alto Health Care System is one of 14 VA hospitals that offer weight loss surgery. At our facility, the Morbid Obesity Surgery Team (MOST) assesses each patient to make sure this surgery is appropriate. The team consists of surgeons: Bassem Safadi and Ramzi Alami;

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Visit our new patient education website at http://www.palo-alto.med.va.gov/patienteducation/patienteducation.htm

# Recipe for Health

## CARROT-RAISIN BREAD

*This tasty bread is low in saturated fat and cholesterol, thanks to the small amount of oil and egg used.*

**Ingredients:**

- 1-1/2 C sifted all-purpose flour
- 1/2 C sugar
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp baking soda
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1-1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground allspice
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1/2 C water
- 2 Tbsp vegetable oil
- 1/2 tsp vanilla
- 1-1/2 C finely shredded carrots
- 1/4 C chopped pecans
- 1/4 C golden raisins

1. Preheat oven to 350° F. Lightly oil a 9x5x3 inch loaf pan.
2. Stir together dry ingredients in large mixing bowl. Make a well in center of dry mixture.
3. In separate bowl, mix together remaining ingredients; add this mixture all at once to dry ingredients. Stir just enough to moisten and evenly distribute carrots.
4. Turn into prepared pan. Bake for 50 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean.
5. Cool 5 minutes in pan. Remove from pan and complete cooling on a wire rack before slicing.

Yield: One loaf—Serving Size: 1/2-inch slice
Each serving provides:
Calories: 99
Total fat: 3 g
Saturated fat: less than 1 g
Cholesterol: 12 mg
Sodium: 97 mg

*http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov*

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# Is Weight Loss Surgery for Me?

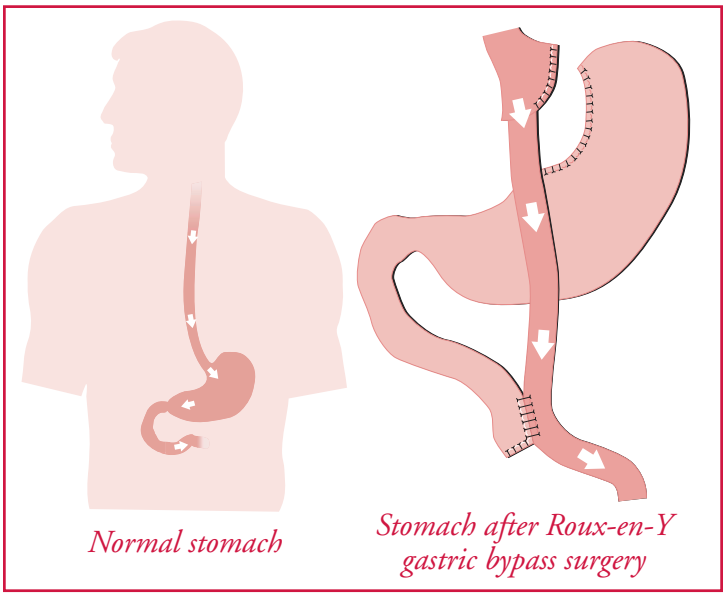
nurses: Nina Bellatorre and Paul Johnson; psychologist: Robert Hall, and dietitian: Evelyn Shinoda. The patient who is considering surgery must be ready to make some permanent lifestyle changes. These include eating smaller portions and being more active. These changes must begin even before surgery is scheduled. The preparation time before surgery can take weeks to months. During this time, testing is done to make sure the patient is healthy enough to have surgery. Most importantly, the patient is given time to show that he or she is motivated. Each patient needs to be aware of the risks involved, including death (1 in 200 may die) and other reversible problems, such as strictures, hernias, and leaks that may occur.

There are several options for weight loss surgery. There are surgeries that restrict the amount of food that can be eaten at one time (i.e. Lap Band). There are other surgeries that both restrict the amount of food that can be eaten and decrease the amount of food that can be absorbed by the body (i.e. Roux-en-Y Gastric Bypass).

At the VA Palo Alto Health Care System, the Roux-en-Y Gastric Bypass is being performed. The surgery is meant to be permanent. This operation is performed through 5 small incisions in the abdomen (laparoscopic) or through a single large incision in the mid-abdomen (open). During the operation, part of the stomach is closed off with staples to form a small pouch. This pouch will limit the amount of food that can be eaten during a meal. The small intestine is divided and part of it (the jejunum) is attached to the new pouch. Less food is absorbed due to a portion of the small intestine being bypassed. These changes let the body use excess fat for energy which results in weight loss. Weight loss occurs steadily for the first year and a half after surgery. In most cases, all the excess weight will not be lost, but a healthier weight can be reached. Achieving a healthier weight has been shown to improve symptoms of diabetes, sleep apnea, high blood pressure, acid reflux, and back and joint problems.

## Common concerns after surgery:

**Food and Hydration** - the stomach is very small after surgery. Fluids must be taken in frequent small amounts to prevent dehydration. Foods also must be taken in small, frequent meals. These foods need to be high in protein and low in concentrated sugar and fat. The smaller stomach empties very quickly and concentrated sugars can cause "dumping". The symptoms of "dumping" include: weakness, cramps, nausea, sweats, diarrhea, and sometimes fainting. Lactose intolerance is sometimes a problem after surgery.




**Vitamin and mineral deficiencies** - Since the intestinal tract has been changed, some vitamins and minerals will not be absorbed like they were before surgery. A multivitamin and additional vitamin B12 and calcium supplements will be needed. Some patients may also require iron supplements. Temporary hair loss is common.

## Who would be a candidate for this procedure?

- Patients must be under 65 years old.
- Individuals with a BMI of 40 or more. The patients with a BMI over 35 would be considered if they had problems such as severe sleep apnea, severe diabetes or obesity which caused physical problems that decrease mobility and or interfered with their family functions or employment possibilities.
- Patients who have failed physician-supervised diets.
- Patients must not have untreated psychiatric or substance abuse problems. This includes smoking.
- Patients must be healthy enough to undergo surgery and anesthesia. Patients with advanced heart problems, kidney problems or lung problems would not be considered.
- Patients must have a stable living situation and support system.

Surgery is not a "quick fix" for obesity. For some patients, whose quality of life is greatly affected by obesity, it does offer a chance to regain control and improve their lives. If you would like more information about the MOST Team or Weight Loss Surgery at VA Palo Health Care System, please call Nina Bellatorre, RN, MS at (650) 849-0561.

# Refilling Medications With Kiosks: *A New Option for Medication Refills*

Did you know that you can now refill your medications using one of nine VAPAHCS Patient Education kiosks? If you are here for an appointment and need to order refills, you may order them through the kiosks.

Each kiosk now has software that will allow you to enter your medication numbers on the touch screen. It is quick and simple. After ordering refills using the kiosk, your medications will be mailed to you, just as they are when you phone in for refills.

The Patient Education kiosks have many other features as well. You can easily look up and read about diseases and conditions. You can learn more about your medications. The kiosks also provide links to many excellent health websites on the Internet. The kiosks have special learning modules about diabetes care and treatment. Additionally, there are also modules on high blood pressure, high cholesterol, cancer prevention, back pain, and stroke. There is even a module on tips for staying healthy when you travel. All 9 kiosks also include My HealtheVet, the personal health information program for veterans.

So, next time you are at one of our clinics, stop by and check out the Patient Education kiosk. At Palo Alto, the kiosks can be found in Building 5 in the 2nd floor waiting room and in Building 100 in the 1st floor Clinic A waiting room. The Livermore Division kiosk is located in the 3rd floor waiting room of Building 62. The kiosk at the Menlo Park Division is in Building 321 in the Mental Health Clinic waiting room. There are also kiosks in Stockton, Modesto, Sonora, Monterey and San Jose.

# You Can Help Prevent Medication Mistakes

*Taken from JCAHO's Speak Up Initiative*

*For more patient safety information you can go to the Joint Commission on Accreditation Website at WWW.JCAHO.ORG*

Medication mistakes happen every day-at the doctor's office, hospital, and even at home. Some mistakes are more serious than others, but all medication mistakes can be prevented. Here are some basic things you can do to help prevent a medication mistake from happening to you or your loved ones.

## At the doctor's office and pharmacy

- Share with your health care provider a list of your current medicines, vitamins, herbs and supplements.
- Whenever you get a new medicine, remind your health care provider about allergies you have, or negative reactions you have had to medicines.
- If you are taking a lot of medicines, ask your health care provider if it is safe to take those medicines together. Do the same thing with vitamins, herbs and other supplements.
- Understand that more medications may not always be better for you. Ask your health care provider how a new medication will help.
- Read the label on your prescription medicine. Make sure it has your name on it and the correct medicine name. Some medicines have similar names that can be confused.
- If you are not sure whether you are supposed to swallow or chew your medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Also, ask your doctor or pharmacist whether you can cut or crush a medicine.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if it is safe to drink alcohol with your medicine.
- Take your medicine as it is prescribed and do not stop taking it without asking your doctor.
- Whenever you are in doubt about a medicine, ask your doctor or pharmacist about it.

## At the hospital and clinic

- Share with your doctor a list of your current medicines, vitamins, herbs and supplements.
- Make sure the doctor or nurse checks your wristband and asks your name before giving you medicine.
- Ask your doctor or nurse how a new medicine will help. Ask for written information about it, including its brand and generic names.
- Ask your doctor or nurse about the possible side effects of your medicines.
- Don't be afraid to tell the nurse or the doctor if you think you are about to get the wrong medicine.
- Know what time you normally get a medicine. If you don't get it then, tell your nurse or doctor.

*(Continued on page 4.)*

## VA Palo Alto Health Care System Facilities

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**VA MENLO PARK DIVISION**
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**VA CAPITOLA OPC**
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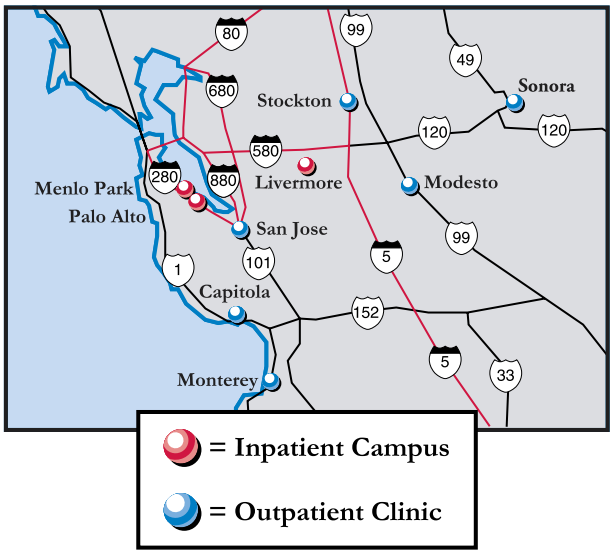
(831) 464-5519

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www.palo-alto.med.va.gov

VA PAHCS
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# You Can Help Prevent Medication Mistakes

- Tell your nurse or doctor if you do not feel well after receiving a medicine. If you think you are having a reaction or experiencing side effects, ask for help immediately.
- If you're not feeling well enough to ask questions about your medicines, have a relative or friend to ask questions for you and to help make sure you get and take the right medicines.
- If you receive intravenous (IV) fluids, read the contents of the bags of IV fluids. If you're not well enough to do this, ask a relative or friend to do it.
- If you are given an IV, ask the nurse how long it should take for the liquid to run out. Tell the nurse if it seems to be dripping too fast or too slow.
- Ask for a copy of your medication administration record. This lists all of the drugs you should be taking. Check it for accuracy. If you are not well enough to do this, ask a friend or relative to help.
- Before you leave the hospital or clinic, make sure that you understand all of the instructions for the medicines you will need to keep taking, and ask any questions you may have about any of your medicines.

### *Questions or Comments?*

If you have any questions or topics you would like addressed in *To Your Health* feel free to contact:

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*To Your Health* is published quarterly for VAPAHCS veterans and their families.

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## Tips for Healthy Living

- Keep a pair of comfortable walking or running shoes in your car and office.
- Flavor foods with herbs, spices, and other low fat seasonings.