

EXPLORER

NEWS

They're now half their former selves

Sleeve surgery yields big losses for two in NW

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Lose half your body weight? It's now achievable, thanks to a new, highly successful surgical weight loss procedure called vertical sleeve gastrectomy.

Oro Valley resident Mark Inskeep underwent the vertical sleeve surgery in May 2008. Thus far, he's lost 272 pounds from his surgical weight of 474.

Northwest resident Cristin Grant weighed 286 pounds when she had the procedure done in July 2007. These days, she's 130 pounds lighter.

They are two of the more than 300 vertical sleeve gastrectomy patients of Stephen Burpee, M.D., and Patrick Chiasson, M.D., of the Southern Arizona Center for Minimally Invasive Surgery.

"The primary function of the stomach is a reservoir that allows us to eat intermittently, instead of continuously," Burpee said. "The sleeve makes the stomach smaller, changing it from a reservoir to a passageway between the esophagus and the intestines. People can't eat very much in one sitting after this surgery."

Burpee said vertical sleeve gastrectomy is for people who are roughly 100 pounds overweight, depending on height. Losing half your body weight is a goal, not an expectation, he noted.

"Most patients can expect to lose about 75 to 80 percent of their excess body weight after the procedure," he said.

His partner, Chiasson, cautioned that the procedure alone won't solve an obesity problem.

"People who do really well are those who make a lifestyle change with the surgery," Chiasson said. "Those are the ones who concentrate on diet and exercise and are the people who do the best to truly transform their lives."

Both Burpee and Chiasson perform the vertical sleeve gastrectomy surgeries at Northwest Medical Center, which recently was named a Bariatric Surgery Center of Excellence by the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery.

Before his surgery, Inskeep, who is Chiasson's patient, took 10 prescription drugs for high blood pressure, diabetes, congestive heart failure and depression. He was on continuous oxygen, and nearly died when a vein in his leg ruptured. Today, he takes no medications and doesn't need supplemental oxygen.

"In my family, we used to celebrate with eating and drown our sorrows with eating," Inskeep said. "I look at food differently now, even though I still enjoy food and love to cook. I consider food as fuel and not as entertainment or comfort any more."

Chiasson pointed out that Inskeep's loss of more than half his body weight isn't unusual.

"Mark is not the exception — I have another patient who went from 474 pounds to 225 pounds in a year after the surgery," Chiasson said. "The best patients are those like Mark who have the surgery and follow a routine of diet and exercise afterward."

For Grant, the weight came off her body quickly after the surgery, but she had to continue to work at the process.

"It's not a magic surgery," Grant said. "In the first few months you have to retrain your stomach by learning how to eat both physically and mentally."

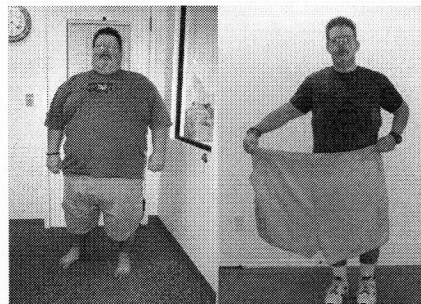
Burpee pointed out there are two other surgical procedures used to reduce weight — gastric bypass and gastric band surgery.

"Gastric bypass is similar to the vertical sleeve procedure, but rearranges a greater portion of the anatomy and is a bit riskier surgery," Burpee said. "While the weight loss results are good, there can be long-term complications like bowel obstructions or stomach ulcers."

With the gastric band surgery, there is no rearranging of a person's innards, he noted.

"It's like putting a belt on top of the stomach and snugging it down to narrow the opening into the stomach," Burpee said. "That slows down the rate of eating, so you eat less and lose weight, but it's not as good as the bypass or the sleeve."

Burpee pointed out that most insurance programs do not cover the sleeve procedure at this time. He expects that to change early in 2010.

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courtesy photos, Mark Inskeep, holding the same shorts above that he was wearing at left, has lost 272 of his original 474 pounds since weight loss surgery.