

Patient Testimonial

Bariatric surgery and healthy lifestyle help Chippewa Falls woman lose and keep off weight



Like many of us, Leslie Swoboda has struggled with her weight for years. The 54-year-old Chippewa Falls, Wis., woman has tried various weight loss programs, dropping pounds periodically just to re-gain them after falling back into old habits.

That ended last year when Swoboda decided enough was enough. She committed to a series of healthy lifestyle changes and underwent bariatric weight loss surgery in June of 2015. Fourteen months later, she's lost 85 pounds and feels markedly better, both physically and emotionally.

"I would say it's a complete 180 degree change. I feel like a different person," says Swoboda, who works as a clinic coding supervisor at Mayo Clinic Health System.

She's now able to partake in activities that were out of reach two years ago – for instance, exercising at the local YMCA five days

a week and walking to a friend's house instead of making the one-mile trip by car.

"Now I don't hesitate. I don't even think about the car," she says.

At Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire, Swoboda underwent a laparoscopic Roux-en-Y gastric bypass procedure, a type of bariatric surgery and the method her surgeon considers to be the gold standard operation. During the procedure, her surgeon divides the upper part of the Swoboda's stomach – making the stomach into the size of an egg – re-route the intestines and attach them to the smaller stomach. After the surgery, Swoboda and other patients who have the surgery feel full quickly, and eat less as a result.

"Our goal in providing bariatric surgery is not necessarily to make you skinny, but it's to make you a lot healthier, make you feel better and help you live longer," says Chris Hower, M.D., a general and bariatric surgeon at Mayo Clinic Health System in Eau Claire.

Dr. Hower notes that bariatric surgery is for people with a body mass index (BMI) over 40 and typically 100 pounds over their ideal weight. It may be performed on patients with a BMI of 35 or more who have an additional disease associated with being overweight, such as diabetes, hypertension, sleep apnea or degenerative joint disease.

"Bariatric surgery is really about changing overall behaviors and lifestyles," Dr. Hower says. "We educate people to change the behaviors that led to them becoming where they are as far as their weight goes – and that takes time."

Unlike other surgeries where a patient may be evaluated one day and have surgery the next week, patients considering bariatric surgery complete a multi-disciplinary, pre-operative program where they work with psychologists, therapists, nutritionists, exercise physiologists, internal medicine doctors and other experts well before their surgery. Afterwards, they meet with many team members again to ensure they're making the necessary lifestyle changes for long-term success. Dr. Hower finds that most patients, at their five-year checkup, have lost and kept off 65 percent of their excess weight.

To be successful, patients have to be committed and willing to change – as Swoboda has.

Accordingly, "Leslie's had excellent results," Dr. Hower says.