

PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH SUSAN

Emotional Side Effects of Bariatric Surgery

Melissa is 45 year old woman who had Bariatric Bypass surgery in 2006. She has lost over 150 pounds and looks great. The only problem is now she is in debt because she has become a shop-aholic.

This is not uncommon. Giving up overeating often leads to adoption of a new compulsion. The adoption of a new compulsion to replace an old one is called "addiction transfer". Addiction transfer occurs when someone is unable or unwilling to rely on one compulsion and so switches to a new compulsion due to not having dealt with the underlying issue behind the compulsion. For example, one may overeat because he/she is lonely or depressed, or for any number of other reasons. This person has gastric bypass to deal with being overweight, but does not address the underlying issues such as depression/loneliness and therefore develops an alternative compulsion strategy such as gambling, alcoholism or excessive shopping. There are millions of people who have undergone gastric bypass who are now dealing with issues of addiction transfer.

Carnie Wilson, one of the most widely publicized gastric bypass cases, became an alcoholic after her post-surgery body made it impossible for her to rely on overeating as a coping mechanism to reduce stress in her life. Others have started having affairs, compulsive shopping or gambling to distract themselves from their underlying issues.

Many patients report depression concerning their weight initially brought them into the Bariatric Surgeon's office in the first place. They do not understand why after losing so much weight they still feeling depressed and anxious. Many envisioned their lives to be so fulfilled and now they report feeling empty. People are now giving them more attention and they are not equipped to handle the feelings that are triggered. Or, they are not getting the attention from their partners and others that they thought they would after all the weight loss.

My patients have found it is essential to examine their relationship with food. They did not realize that over eating served a purpose for them. It perhaps distracted them from their feelings. They swallowed their feelings. Now that they are unable to eat in the same way they need to learn to deal with their feelings not find another addiction to hide behind.

Susan Simon-Fleischer, M.S.W., LCSW, CSW-R, BCD offers individual sessions and support groups which focus on the principles of *Examining Your Relationships with Food*.

For more information, please contact:

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