

About Bariatric Surgery

Contents

What is obesity?	1
Why is it important to treat obesity?	1
What is bariatric surgery?	1
What is a sleeve gastrectomy?	2
What are the possible complications?	3
Is bariatric surgery right for me?	4
What is BMI?	5
How will bariatric surgery help me to lose weight?.....	5
How much weight will I lose?	5
What will happen after my surgery?.....	6
What can I eat after my surgery?	7
Nutrition plan stages	7
If I follow my nutrition plan, will I lose weight?	9
What will happen to my skin?.....	9
Will I lose my hair?	10
What kind of follow-up care will I need?	10
What are the possible risks of bariatric surgery?.....	11
What are my responsibilities as a bariatric surgery patient?	12
Will I be able to have a baby after bariatric surgery?	13
How do I get referred for bariatric surgery?	14

Bariatric Surgery

What is obesity?

- Obesity (having an unhealthy amount of body fat) is a chronic (ongoing) disease. It may be caused by:
 - › Genetics (health conditions passed from parents to children)
 - › Environment
 - › Culture
 - › Psychology (mental health)
- In Canada, obesity affects 1 in 3 people.
- As of 2025, obesity affects half (50%) of Canadians.

Why is it important to treat obesity?

- People living with obesity do not live as long as people without obesity.
Obesity can cause medical conditions, like:
 - › Type 2 diabetes
 - › High blood pressure
 - › Cardiovascular (heart) disease
 - › Sleep apnea
 - › Stroke
 - › Arthritis
 - › Different types of cancer
 - › Fatty liver disease
- **Obesity can also affect your mental health.** You may feel:
 - › Depressed
 - › Shame
 - › Guilt
- Obesity is the second leading cause of preventable death in Canada. About 30,000 people die from obesity and obesity-related diseases each year.

What is bariatric surgery?

- Bariatric surgery makes your stomach smaller so you feel full after eating less food. This can help people with obesity who have not been able to medically manage their weight over a long period of time.
- This surgery changes your stomach size to help you change your eating habits.
But to lose weight, you will also need to:
 - › Eat healthy foods
 - › Do regular physical activity
 - › Change your behaviours

What types of bariatric surgery does Nova Scotia Health offer?

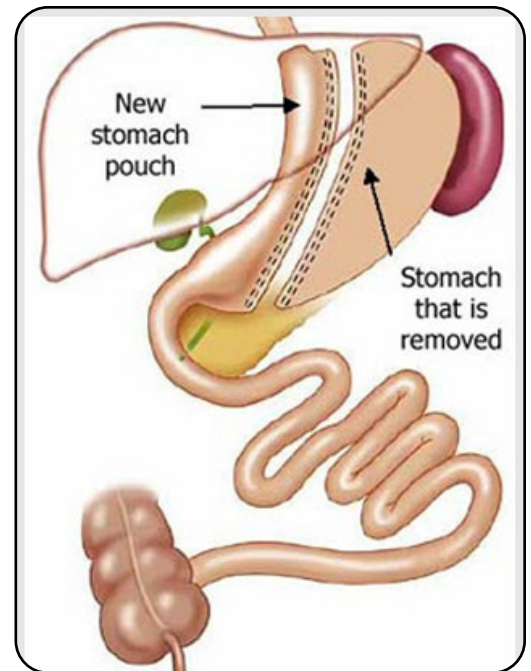
- Although there are different types of bariatric surgery, Nova Scotia Health only offers **laparoscopic sleeve gastrectomy** (also called **gastric sleeve resection**).
 - › Laparoscopic means the surgery is done using instruments put through small incisions (cuts) in your abdomen (stomach area).
- The benefits of laparoscopic surgery compared to open surgery with a large incision include:
 - › Faster recovery
 - › Less risk of complications (like a hernia)
- **We do not offer:**
 - › Roux-en Y gastric bypass surgery
 - › Laparoscopic adjustable gastric band (LAGB) surgery (also called a stomach band or a lap band)
 - › Biliopancreatic diversion
 - › Duodenal switch
 - › Endoscopic sleeve gastroplasty (ESG)

What is a sleeve gastrectomy?

- Since your stomach is smaller:
 - › You will feel full after eating less food.
 - › Many of the hormones which stimulate (increase) hunger are removed. You will have less cravings and feel less hungry.
 - › **You will still need to eat healthy foods, be physically active, and change your behaviour.**

How is it done?

- The surgeon will make small incisions in your abdomen. They will put a laparoscope with a video camera on the end through 1 of the incisions.
- They will use the laparoscope to guide them as they remove part of your stomach while viewing a screen.
- Since your stomach is smaller, you will feel full after eating less food. This will help you to lose weight.



Can a sleeve gastrectomy be reversed?

No.

What are the possible complications?

- › Bleeding (1 to 5% chance)
- › Gastrointestinal (stomach and intestine) leak (1 to 3% chance)
- › Deep vein thrombosis (a blood clot that forms in a deep vein in your arm or leg) (1 to 2% chance)
- › Splenectomy (spleen accidentally detaches) (1% chance)
- › Pulmonary embolus (1 or more blood clots break off and travel to a lung) (0.5% chance)
- › Death within 30 days (less than 0.5% chance)
- Having bariatric surgery is a big decision.
 - › **You will still need to eat healthy foods, be physically active, and change your behaviours.**
 - › You will also need medical follow-up for the rest of your life.
- Bariatric surgery can help to lower the risk of early death and improve obesity-related conditions (see page 1).
- For many people, the benefits of having the surgery are greater than the risks of possible complications.

Is bariatric surgery right for me?

- Most people who are in the program have a BMI (see page 5) of 40 or higher. Bariatric surgery may be right for you if you:
 - › Are between 17 and 65 years old
 - › Have a BMI less than 60
 - › Have a BMI above 35 **and** a chronic disease, like:
 - › High blood pressure
 - › Type 2 diabetes
 - › High cholesterol
 - › Fatty liver disease
 - › Heart disease
 - › Sleep apnea
 - › Have a history of obesity over a long period of time
- Bariatric surgery **may not** be right for you if you:
 - › Have severe (very bad) pulmonary (lung) disease
 - › Have unstable coronary (heart) artery disease
 - › Have a condition which could affect your anesthesia (medication to put you to sleep during surgery), incision healing, or safe weight loss
 - › Are pregnant, plan to get pregnant within 2 years, or are breastfeeding/chestfeeding
 - › Are not able to:
 - › Understand how the surgery works
 - › Follow healthy eating and physical activity plans after your surgery
 - › Get medical follow-up after your surgery
- **Bariatric surgery is not right for you if you:**
 - › Struggle with substance use (like alcohol or drugs)
 - › Smoke (including tobacco and cannabis)
 - › **You must stop smoking for at least 6 months before your surgery.** This is to lower your risk for complications during and after your surgery.
 - › Have an eating disorder (like binge eating, bulimia, or anorexia)
 - › Have a serious psychiatric condition that would prevent you from:
 - › Following healthy eating and physical activity plans after your surgery
 - › Getting medical follow-up after your surgery

What is BMI?

- BMI (body mass index) is based on your height and weight.
- The bariatric surgery team uses your BMI to help us decide if bariatric surgery is right for you.
 - › We do not do bariatric surgery on a person with a BMI over 60.
 - › We do not do bariatric surgery on anyone with a BMI under 35.

To find out your BMI:

- Visit:
 - › www.nhlbi.nih.gov/calculate-your-bmi

How will bariatric surgery help me to lose weight?

- **Smaller stomach:** Your stomach will be a new, small “pouch”. Having a smaller stomach means that you will feel full after eating a smaller amount of food. Your new stomach is more likely to stretch.
- **Lower appetite (feeling hungry):** This surgery removes the part of your stomach that makes ghrelin (a hormone that makes you feel hungry), so you will feel less hungry.
- Together with healthy eating and physical activity, bariatric surgery can raise your chances of losing weight.

How much weight will I lose?

- How much weight you will lose and how fast is different for each person. It will depend on many things, like:
 - › The type of surgery you had
 - › What you eat after your surgery
 - › How much physical activity you do
- People who have bariatric surgery usually lose about 50 to 70% of their extra weight within 5 years. This is about $\frac{1}{3}$ (33%) of how much you weighed before your surgery.
 - › You will start losing up to 6 pounds a week right after your surgery.
 - › Then you will lose weight more slowly over the next 12 to 24 months (1 to 2 years). The goal during the first few months is to lose about 1 to 2 pounds a week. You may not lose the same amount of weight each week.

- **Remember**, each person is different and you may lose weight faster or slower.

- **Weight loss is not guaranteed.**
- **You may also regain any weight you lose.** You must follow healthy eating and physical activity plans to keep up long-term weight loss.

- **Remember**, the goal of this surgery is to help you lose extra weight that puts you at risk for serious medical problems. The goal is **not** to make you thin.
- **It is important to know what to expect after your surgery.**
 - › Some people are able to reach a BMI of 25 or less, but most people will still have a BMI of 25 to 29.9 (overweight).
 - › Instead of focusing on how your body looks, try to think about how you feel and what you can do to improve your overall physical and emotional health.

What will happen after my surgery?

- People who have a laparoscopic sleeve gastrectomy usually stay in the hospital for 2 days. Sometimes, they may have to stay longer.
- It is normal to have some discomfort. Your bariatric surgery team will give you pain medication to help with this.
- We will help you get up and walk on the day of your surgery, if it is safe for you to do so. **Do not get up for the first time on your own.**
- Most people go back to their usual activities in about 4 weeks (1 month).
- The bariatric surgery team will give you more information about what to expect.

What can I eat after my surgery?

After bariatric surgery, you must follow healthy eating and physical activity plans for the rest of your life. This will help you to reach and keep up your weight loss as safely as possible.

- **Because your stomach will be smaller, it is important to:**
 - › **learn to eat slowly and chew your food very well to help with digestion (breaking down food).**
 - › **choose the right foods and fluids in the right amounts for good nutrition.** We will show you how to choose foods with the right amounts of protein, fat, and complex carbohydrates (sugars) to help with your weight loss and your health.

Nutrition plan stages

- **Stage 1:** Your first sip of water after surgery
- **Stage 2:** Clear fluids that are not carbonated (bubbly) or caffeinated for 12 hours
- **Stage 3:** Nutritious, thickened fluids for 4 weeks
- **Stage 4:** Minced, soft, high protein foods for 4 weeks
 - › **It is important to eat small amounts, eat slowly, and chew your food very well.**
- **Stage 5:** Small, balanced meals and snacks, enough fluids and protein, and a daily multivitamin and mineral supplement for the rest of your life
- You will meet with the bariatric surgery team and a dietitian before your surgery and as you recover. **It is very important to go to all of your follow-up appointments.** We will help you learn about nutrition and how to choose healthy foods. You will learn about:
- **Fluids:** More than half of a healthy body is made up of fluids. Because your stomach will be smaller after your surgery, you will need to drink small sips of fluid every hour you are awake. This is to make sure you get enough fluids. During stages 4 and 5 of your nutrition plan, you must drink fluids **between** meals, **not with** meals. If you do not get enough fluids (called **dehydration**), you may:
 - › Have a headache
 - › Have a dry mouth
 - › Pee less
 - › Be constipated (not able to poop)

- **Protein:** Protein helps your body:
 - › Build and repair tissues
 - › Digest food
 - › Keep your hair, skin, and muscles healthy
 - › Lose weight
 - › Your dietitian will tell you how much and what types of protein (like dairy, meat, fish, poultry, and soy) are right for you.
- **Carbohydrates (carbs):** Carbs are a good source of energy, fibre, vitamins, and minerals. They include:
 - › Whole grains
 - › Legumes (dried peas, beans, and lentils)
 - › Vegetables
 - › Fruits

Right after your surgery, you will need to limit these foods and change their consistency (thickness). Your dietitian will tell you how much and what types of carbs are right for you.

- **Fat:**
 - › Gives you energy
 - › Helps your body take in and move vitamins A, D, K, and E
 - › Helps to keep your nervous system and your immune system healthy
 - › Helps to keep your skin, hair, and nails healthy

Your dietitian will talk with you about what types of fats are right for you.

- **Vitamins and minerals:** You will need to take a multivitamin and mineral supplement for the rest of your life. Your doctor will do blood work to check if you need any other supplements. Your dietitian will talk with you about what supplements are right for you.

You may not be able to tolerate (handle) certain raw vegetables, bread, pasta, rice, or red meat after surgery.

- **Bariatric surgery does not stop you from gaining weight if you:**
 - › Eat a lot of calories from unhealthy foods
 - › Snack often
 - › Eat large meals
 - › Do not get regular physical activity
- Bariatric surgery helps most people to eat fewer calories which causes them to lose and keep off weight. But you can still overeat after your surgery, which can cause your stomach to stretch.

If I follow my nutrition plan, will I lose weight?

To lose weight and keep it off long-term, you must:

- **Eat healthy foods:** The main reason you lose weight and keep it off is because you are eating fewer calories after your surgery. To do this, you must:
 - › Choose healthy foods (like lean proteins, whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low fat dairy products) in small portions (amounts)
 - › Limit high fat and high sugar foods, ultra-processed foods, and alcohol
- **Get regular physical activity:** It is important to start getting regular physical activity right after your surgery. Your bariatric surgery team will help you learn how to do this safely. **You should get at least 30 to 60 minutes (half an hour to 1 hour) of activity in a row each day.**
 - › The best activity is walking, either in a pool or on a soft surface (like a treadmill).
 - › Resistance exercises (like lifting light weights and resistance band exercises) will help with weight loss and toning.
- **Be able to cope with change:** Bariatric surgery will likely change many areas of your life, like:
 - › Your body image (how you feel about your body)
 - › Your lifestyle (like following healthy eating and physical activity plans)
 - › How you are as you lose weight
 - › Your relationships with your loved ones

Your long-term weight loss will depend on how you cope (deal) with these changes.

What will happen to my skin?

- People often have loose skin after weight loss. This will depend on how old you are and how much weight you lost.
- You may have loose skin on your:
 - › Abdomen
 - › Trunk
 - › Upper arms
 - › Breasts
 - › Thighs

- Once you have been at the same weight for about 1 year, you may want to think about having plastic surgery. The Halifax Bariatric Surgery Clinic **does not** do this type of surgery. You will need a referral from your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) to a plastic surgeon.
- Plastic surgery is done for health reasons (like skin rashes, ulcers, and infections that do not go away). It is not done to improve how you look. It cannot reverse all of the changes caused by your skin stretching.

Will I lose my hair?

- Hair loss can be related to:
 - › Any type of surgery
 - › Emotional stress
 - › Losing weight quickly
- Some people lose hair about 3 months after bariatric surgery. This is more common in women.
- The hair usually gets thinner. It does not come out in clumps. This can last for 3 to 6 months.
- It can help to:
 - › Eat healthy foods with at least 60 to 80 grams of protein a day
 - › Take your multivitamin and mineral supplement

What kind of follow-up care will I need?

- To check your health and nutrition, you will need to have blood work done:
 - › 1 month after your surgery
 - › At least 3 times within the first year after your surgery
 - › Every year after that
- During the first year after your surgery, you will have appointments to:
 - › learn about health and nutrition.
 - › make sure that you are losing weight safely.
- Your surgeon will contact you 4 to 6 weeks after your surgery.
- You will have appointments with the nurse practitioner and the dietitian:
 - › 3 months after your surgery
 - › 6 months after your surgery
- You will need to take a daily multivitamin, mineral supplement, and other supplements for the rest of your life.

What are the possible risks of bariatric surgery?

- As with any surgery, there are risks. The overall risk of complications is about 10%.
- There is a small risk of death. This will depend on your general health. In Canada, the risk of death is about 1% or less.
- Your doctor will tell you the general risks of abdominal (stomach area) surgery and the risks of the type of bariatric surgery you are having. Your risk will depend on your age, sex (male or female), and overall health.

Possible risks include:

- › **General complications:** Bariatric surgery has many of the same risks as any abdominal surgery, like:
 - › Dehydration
 - › Incision problems
 - › Trouble swallowing food
 - › Infection
 - › Nausea (upset stomach)
 - › Blood clots
 - › Bleeding
 - › Abdominal hernia (when an organ pushes through the muscle or tissue around it)
- › **Gallstones:** When you lose weight quickly, you have a higher risk of developing gallstones (clumps of cholesterol and other matter that form in the gallbladder). This happens in more than 1/3 of patients who have bariatric surgery.
- › You will be prescribed a medication (like ursodiol) for 6 months after your surgery to lower the chance of gallstones forming.
- › **Vitamin and/or mineral deficiency (not having enough):** After bariatric surgery, you must take a multivitamin and mineral supplement for the rest of your life. This is because you will be eating a lot less food. Your doctor will do blood work to check if you need any other supplements. Your dietitian will talk with you about what supplements are right for you.
- › Most vitamin and nutrient deficiencies can be avoided by getting regular blood work and taking supplements.
- › **Not losing as much weight as you would like:** Most people lose weight after bariatric surgery. It is common to gain back **some** of the weight you lost years after your surgery. Some people gain back all of the weight they lost. This will depend on what you eat, how active you are, and your lifestyle after your surgery.

Weight loss is not guaranteed.

- Even though your stomach is smaller, you can still take in a lot of calories if you snack often between meals. **Snacking on unhealthy foods (like potato chips, crackers, pretzels, nuts, and cookies) is the most common cause of regaining weight after bariatric surgery.**
- Bariatric surgery can raise your chance of losing weight by changing the way your body digests food. It is important to choose healthy foods and get regular physical activity. To lose and keep weight off long-term, you will need to make healthy eating and lifestyle habits **before** your surgery and keep them up for the rest of your life.
- Ask your doctor if you have any questions.

What are my responsibilities as a bariatric surgery patient?

- **Be on time** for all of your appointments (in-person and virtual).
- **Have blood work done** before your appointments.
- **Tell the bariatric surgery team about any health concerns and about your progress.**
- **Stop smoking.** Smoking raises your risk of serious or life-threatening surgery complications. **You must stop smoking for 6 months before your surgery.**
 - › We may ask for a urine (pee) or blood sample to test for nicotine in your system if we suspect that you are using tobacco. **If you use tobacco in any form, your surgery will be cancelled.**
- **Keep trying to lose weight.** Losing 10 to 20 pounds before your surgery can make your surgery safer and your recovery easier. **If you do not lose weight before your surgery, your surgery may be cancelled.**
- **Get regular physical activity. It is important to get as much physical activity as you can.** Try to get at least 30 to 60 minutes of activity (like swimming, walking, dancing) in a row each day. **If you have knee or back problems, try:**
 - › Arm exercises while sitting
 - › Water aerobics
 - › Walking for 10 minutes, 3 times a day

- **Learn how your life will change after having bariatric surgery.**
 - › Learn about the risks and possible complications.
 - › Know what foods you will be eating after surgery and make a plan.
 - › Write down any questions you may have for the bariatric surgery team.
- **Ask your loved ones for support.**
 - › **You must have a support person help you after surgery.**
 - › You can have your support person attend your appointments with you.

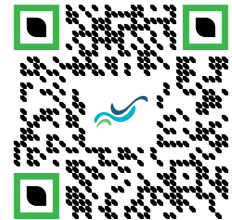
Will I be able to have a baby after bariatric surgery?

- We recommend waiting for at least **2 years** after bariatric surgery before trying to get pregnant. Your body needs time to adjust to the changes in your digestion. Getting pregnant before it adjusts can put a strain on you and your baby.
- Before getting pregnant:
 - › Visit your primary health care provider or obstetrician for a full physical exam. They will talk with you about getting enough nutrition during pregnancy.
 - › Talk with the bariatric surgery team dietitian about healthy eating before pregnancy.
- When you are pregnant:
 - › You will have follow-up appointments to make sure you can keep a healthy weight and to check your baby's growth and development.

How do I get referred for bariatric surgery?

- Ask your primary health care provider to refer you by using the *Bariatric Surgery Pathway Referral Document*:
 - › <https://www.nshealth.ca/documents-and-reports/bariatric-surgery-pathway-referral-document>
- Once your referral is received, you will be added to the waitlist.
- Start following the lifestyle changes in the pamphlet called *Bariatric Surgery eLearning Program* as soon as you can. Ask a member of the bariatric surgery team for this pamphlet, scan the QR code below, or visit:
 - › www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/2542

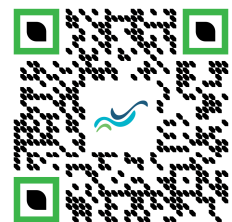
Scan the QR code below on your device (open the camera on your device, point the camera at the code, and tap the banner or border that appears)



- You will have a 1-hour intake appointment with the bariatric surgery team's nurse practitioner and dietitian when:
 - › you have finished the Bariatric Surgery eLearning Program.
 - › your primary health care provider decides you are ready.
- They will ask about your health history and check if bariatric surgery is right for you. This is a good time to ask questions.
- If you decide that the surgery is right for you, we will book an in-person appointment with a surgeon.
- For more information:

Common Questions About Bariatric Surgery

- › www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/2543



What are your questions?
Please ask a member of your health care team.
We are here to help you.

Questions for my health care team:

[illegible]

Notes:

[illegible]

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

*Prepared by: Halifax Obesity Network
Designed and Managed by: Library Services*



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.en>

In reproducing this content, you agree to the following Terms of Use and Disclaimer:

Terms of Use – CC BY-NC-SA https://library.nshealth.ca/ld.php?content_id=37651025

W085-2541 © November 2025 Nova Scotia Health Authority

To be reviewed November 2028 or sooner, if needed.