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# Bariatric Surgery Benefits the Whole Family

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## MedPage Today Action Points

- Explain that a study found that obese relatives living with a patient who undergoes bariatric surgery had a significant drop in weight a year after the procedure.

- Note that adult family members improved their eating habits, with significantly less uncontrollable eating and emotional eating.

## Review

When one family member has bariatric surgery, the others lost weight as well, researchers found.

Obese relatives living with the surgery patient had a significant drop in weight a year after the procedure (*P*=0.01), John Morton, MD, PhD, of Stanford University, and colleagues reported in the October issue of the *Archives of Surgery*.

Bariatric surgery may be able to "induce weight loss and healthy behaviors in people surrounding the patient," they wrote.

Studies have shown that weight loss is socially contagious, they explained, since spouses who enroll in weight loss programs together tend to shed more pounds, as do those who join a support group.

Thus, if one family member makes lifestyle changes after surgery, it's possible that other family members will do so as well, Morton and colleagues wrote.

They looked at changes in weight and healthy behaviors in 35 patients who had Roux-en-Y gastric bypass, along with 35 adult family members and 15 children, in a single-center, prospective, longitudinal study between Jan. 1, 2007, and Dec. 31, 2009.

Family members were required to attend three patient preoperative educational sessions and all postoperative visits where lifestyle modification was emphasized.

Before the operation, 60% of adult family members and 73% of children were obese.

The researchers found that the mean weight of adult family members fell overall, from 220 lbs. to 198 lbs., but the decline wasn't significant.

However, when family members were divided up based on their level of obesity before the surgery, there was a significant drop in weight for obese adults after one year -- from 234 lbs. to 226 lbs. (*P*=0.01).

There was also a significant decline in waist circumference for this group, from 119 cm to 111 cm (*P*=0.03).

As expected, children gained weight in the year after surgery, due to natural growth. Yet their expected one-year mean body mass index (BMI) was higher than the observed one-year BMI, the researchers reported.

In obese children, the expected BMI of 31.2 was higher than the observed BMI of 29.6, but the trend wasn't significant.

In kids who weren't obese, the expected BMI was lower than the observed BMI, they added, and waist circumference remained the same in all children.

Kids did have small but non-significant increases in quality of life, as well as non-significant declines in the number of hours spent in front of the TV.

Similarly, they significantly increased their physical activity levels (*P*=0.04), as did adult family members (*P*=0.005).

Adults also improved their eating habits, with significantly less uncontrollable eating (*P*=0.01) and emotional eating (*P*=0.04) at one year.

They also drank less alcohol, falling from 11 drinks per month to just one drink per month (*P*=0.009).

"These data suggest that following surgery, family members were conscious of and attempting to limit maladaptive eating patterns," they wrote.

They concluded that "having a family member undergo weight loss surgery is a powerful reminder for dietary modification."

They added that bariatric surgery programs should encourage family members to participate in patient support groups and education sessions in order to "capitalize on the halo effects" of the procedure.

The study was supported by the Medical Scholars Program at Stanford.

The researchers reported no conflicts of interest.

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Woodard GA, et al "Halo effect for bariatric surgery" *Arch Surg* 2011; 146(10): 1185-1190.

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