Living and succeeding with a gastric band

Practical advice for patients
Bariatric surgery (weight loss surgery) is currently the most effective treatment for obesity and is possibly the most effective and successful treatment long term.

It is vitally important that you understand how the band works as well as how the band fails.

The band works in two ways:

- Firstly, the pouch above the band will hold only a very small volume of food. This allows you to restrict the quantity of food you eat in one meal regardless of how much you ate before the operation.
- Secondly, by sitting around the topmost part of the stomach, it fools your stomach into thinking that there is already food in your tummy. This helps to prevent you feeling hungry between meals.

**Physical Hunger vs. Emotional Hunger**

The band is very effective at controlling the physical feelings of hunger. However, at the beginning, perhaps the most difficult skill to learn is how to tell the difference between physical and emotional hunger.

**What is emotional hunger?**

Emotional hunger is the sense of needing or wanting to eat regardless of whether we are actually hungry or not. This may be due to boredom, happiness, sadness, loneliness, or just part of being sociable. These triggers for eating are difficult to change and it will take time for you to understand them. What is important is that you spend time trying to understand why you over-eat.

Many people have developed a routine for emotional eating – such as snacking in front of the TV in the evening, buying unhealthy snacks on the way home from work or finishing off their children’s meals. These routines are difficult to break. But it is important that you allow yourself time to think about why and when you eat and develop ways to avoid eating during these ‘high risk’ times.

Writing down everything that you eat can help you to identify your ‘high risk’ times for emotional eating. You may find that you snack
more than you thought or that you accept food when it is offered to you even when you are not actually hungry.

Healthy eating

It is important that you eat a healthy diet. Because your meals will be small, every mouthful counts. Your food needs to be nutritious and balanced.

On a 7” plate we suggest that half of your plate is filled with vegetables (not including potato) and the second half is evenly split between protein (meat, fish, or alternatives) and carbohydrate (potato, pasta, rice and bread etc).

This small plate should not be piled high above the edge of the plate or be so crammed full that you cannot see any plate between the food. **It is a very small meal.**

For example: a main meal may consist of 1 egg-sized potato, 1/3 of a fillet of salmon, served on a 7” plate with half the plate filled with vegetables.

**Carbohydrate**
The carbohydrate portion of your meal is essential. This will give you the B vitamins you need and ensure you make the most of your energy-providing food. Carbohydrate gives you a slow steady release of energy to keep you going until your next meal. Skipping carbohydrate will cause your blood sugar level to drop. This will then cause sugar cravings and snacking between meals because you will feel very hungry. Carbohydrate includes potato, pasta, rice, bread, crispbreads and many more foods.

**Vitamins and Minerals**
Achieving the right levels of vitamin and minerals can be difficult with such small portion sizes. For this reason you may need to take some extra vitamin or mineral supplements, for example calcium or iron tablets. Your Dietitian will be able to discuss this with you in more detail while you are still in hospital.
Protein
The protein portion of your meal will provide you with essential proteins required for cell growth and repair. Protein can be meat, fish or vegetarian options such as pulses, Quorn or tofu and should only provide you with ¼ of your small meal. Foods rich in protein will help you feel satisfied after your meal.

Vegetables and fruit
The vegetable and fruit portion will provide fibre and bulk for a healthy digestive system as well as providing a variety of vitamins and minerals. It is important to try to vary the type of fruit and vegetables you eat as much as possible, e.g. varying vegetables for seasonal favourites. A selection of fruit and vegetables should compose half of your meal.

Without healthy eating the band will fail.

Band adjustments
Because the band is adjustable, the degree of restriction can be tailored to your individual needs. This will depend on your weight loss so far and how you are adapting to life with a gastric band.

Your first adjustment may take place after around 6-8 weeks. The amount of water that we add is a decision we take very seriously. It depends on several things: the size of the band, how hungry or full you are feeling, your dietary intake, what your pouch looks like on x-rays and how much weight you have lost so far.

Most importantly, there is nothing remarkable about any particular volume and the same volume in two bands in two different people can have very different effects. Increasing the volume of water inside the band too fast or by too much is likely to cause complications which lead to weight gain rather than extra weight loss.

Despite the sometimes misleading information on the internet, getting a “fill” is much more than going to clinic and requesting some fluid to be added to the band. It is a real clinical consultation and involves
sitting down with someone knowledgeable and experienced, usually our Clinical Nurse Specialist, Senior Dietitian or Surgeon. It is important to discuss your eating pattern, your dietary intake, any difficulties or symptoms you may be experiencing, as well as generally reviewing how you have been since we last saw you and how to continue in the near future.

Please note that the band is often tighter in the morning, this is normal. The hormones which help you to wake up in the morning can make the stomach inside of the band swell very slightly; this will decrease through the morning. Please take extra care if this occurs.

For women it is important to note that the band may become tighter at certain points in your menstrual cycle.

### Taking control

From the moment you first considered bariatric surgery you started taking control of your own health and future. If you have decided that the gastric band is right for you, it is time to see how you can make sure that your band is as effective as possible. Other than the fact that the gastric band comes in two sizes, there are no other differences from one band to another. It is the decisions you will make over the forthcoming months which will determine the success of your weight loss.

**Remember, the band is a powerful tool, not a miracle cure.**

### Exercise and activity

Exercise will increase the rate at which you lose weight, as well as improving your general body shape, and so is a great confidence boost. Find the time of day which best suits your lifestyle, as this will help you stick to your programme of activity. For example, you will
soon start to find excuses to avoid a planned 7am walk if you are simply not a morning person.

Fitting extra activity into your daily lifestyle is a great way of sticking to your programme. This could be walking the dog or even getting off the bus one stop early and walking the rest of the way.

Taking the stairs at work and when shopping is another great way to fit in extra activity without feeling self-conscious. You could even take a walk with a like-minded friend for 20 minutes during your lunch break. Walking is a great activity: it is good for the muscle tone, it improves bone density and best of all, it’s free!

By achieving 20 minutes of extra activity a day you would accomplish over 2 hours a week.

Take a look to see how you can move more during a normal day:

**Weekday:**
- Get off bus one stop early on way to work: 8 minutes
- Walk up stairs at work; total during day: 4 minutes
- Get off bus one stop early on the way home: 8 minutes

**TOTAL:** 20 minutes

**Weekend:**
- Take a walk to the shops for milk and a newspaper instead of getting them delivered.
- Mow the grass and catch up with your gardening.
- Wash the car by hand. But don’t just flick the hose over the car: by making sure you crouch down to the lowest parts and stretch up to the roof you could get a full body work out!

**TOTAL:** 20 minutes each.

However you increase your activity, you are increasing your chances of successful weight loss. Over time, being more active will become part of your everyday routine. Not only is this great for your health and confidence but it also sets a great example to those around you, whether colleagues, your friends or your family.
Commitment

Once you have had your gastric band fitted you will need to come for regular clinic appointments. It is vital that you attend these appointments so we can monitor your progress and discuss any concerns you may have.

We may also discuss arrangements for your band adjustments during these appointments. These clinic appointments may be as early as 9am Monday – Friday so please make sure you can attend regularly before you agree to surgery.

For the first 2-4 weeks after your surgery you will be expected to follow a liquid diet. This is due to the swelling around the band. After slowly building up your diet to the correct consistency you will still need to eat a healthy balanced diet. Your dietitian will help you with this. Committing to the healthy eating plan is essential as the band alone will not make you lose weight; it simply acts as a tool to keep you on track. You have the best chance of great success if you follow the dietary advice about the type of food you eat and also the consistency.

The weight loss process can take a long time. Experience suggests that you will reach your optimum weight loss at around two years after your surgery. This commitment requires motivation and willpower, not only for the two years leading towards your weight loss goal but for lifelong weight maintenance.

The 6 fundamental principles of weight loss with a gastric band:

**Eat three meals per day**
Your new pouch allows food to empty slowly into your stomach. You should feel satisfied with 3 small, solid meals, without snacking. Avoid developing “grazing” eating patterns – this is when you eat small amounts constantly throughout the day.
Each meal should fit easily on a 7” plate
Eating too large a portion may result in your pouch stretching; you will then need to eat more to feel satisfied. This can increase the likelihood of future complications. Stop eating when you are no longer hungry and avoid eating until the point when you experience discomfort.

Choose solid foods which require chewing
These foods will empty more slowly into your stomach, and you will stay full for longer. This means you will be more satisfied with smaller volumes. Avoid soft foods as you will require larger volumes to feel satisfied as they slip through the band.

Chew your foods well and eat slowly
This will reduce the likelihood of foods becoming stuck in your pouch.

Do not drink at meal times
Taking liquids with your meal allows the food to pass from your pouch into your stomach much more quickly. You will consequently feel hungry soon after eating and will find that you can eat a large meal. Drinking immediately after a meal may also stretch the pouch, resulting in discomfort, regurgitation and vomiting. Have any liquids at least 15 minutes before eating and wait at least 1 hour after eating.

All fluids should be low calorie
As liquids will flow almost straight through the band, please make sure these are low calorie or free from calories. Fruit juice, smoothies and alcohol are all high in calories and should be taken in moderation. Fizzy drinks should be avoided as they can cause discomfort and have been reported to increase the likelihood of enlarging the pouch.
How to contact us if you have any questions or concerns

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you need further advice on your diet, please contact:

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Useful Websites

www.bospa.org  (British Obesity Surgery Patient Association)

www.wlsinfo.org.uk  (Weight Loss Info)
If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221473. When we receive your call we may transfer you to an interpreter. This can take some time, so please be patient.