

vital SIGNS

For the Physicians of Twelve Oaks Medical Center

Bariatric surgery proving useful for patients with other ailments in addition to obesity



Dr. Felix Spiegel

patients to lose significant amounts of weight prior to performing a surgical procedure, such as a hip or knee replacement, says Dr. Felix Spiegel, one of a number of bariatric surgeons practicing at Twelve Oaks. In some cases, the specialists – especially cardiologists – refer their patients simply because they want their patients to live longer and healthier lives.

“Many orthopedic surgeons are referring their patients for bariatric surgery so that the procedures they eventually perform are more successful, and they are smart to do so.

An increasing number of cardiologists, orthopedists, gastroenterologists, endocrinologists and other specialists are referring morbidly obese patients to Twelve Oaks Medical Center for bariatric surgery.

Referrals are being made by more and more specialists who want their

They know that outcomes of their surgeries will be better if the patient is not morbidly obese. For instance, patients who lose weight prior to orthopedic surgery have lower infection rates and fewer problems with any hardware that may be installed,” he explained.

“Infection rates for joint replacements or back surgery have proven to be much higher for people who are obese. They can be life-threatening, and orthopedic surgeons really don’t want that,” said Dr. Spiegel. “The patients’ joints are under a lot less stress when they lose weight, and consequently, the joint replacement generally lasts longer.”

Co-morbidities from being severely overweight, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol or Type II diabetes, may be alleviated when patients lose 50, 100 or 150 pounds or more, often to where the patients no longer have to take medications, he added.

Benefits also may include significant reduction in other obesity-related problems, such as sleep apnea, severe acid reflux, urinary stress incontinence, or osteoarthritis pain. In addition, patients experience improvements in mobility and self-esteem.

Despite the documented benefits, many health professionals don’t refer patients for bariatric surgery because they believe obesity is a result of bad eating habits rather than a physiological problem, Dr. Spiegel said.

“Usually, these are healthcare professionals who believe patients are obese because, consciously or unconsciously, patients choose to be obese. They think it’s the same as smoking. They think that by telling a patient to eat less or go on some diet, the patient won’t be obese, but this is just not true,” Dr. Spiegel said.

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Bariatric Surgery

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“These health professionals don’t realize that non-surgical weight loss methods simply don’t work in the long run for clinically severe obese individuals. But if they really want to help their patients, they would refer them to a bariatric surgeon for intervention. It’s the only chance morbidly obese individuals have. They’re not going to be able to just go on a diet and lose 100 to 150 pounds and keep it off for 10 years or more. It’s just not going to happen without bariatric surgery,” said Dr. Spiegel.

While the gastric bypass, which can be performed laparoscopically, is the procedure most often used in the United States, Dr. Spiegel prefers to use the laparoscopic lap-band procedure. He pointed out that the bypass is more often used because it’s been around for more than 40 years, whereas the lap-band procedure has been around for only four years in the United States. “Worldwide, the lap-band procedure is used more than any other procedure. It was used for 10 years in Europe, Australia, South America, South Africa and even in the Middle East before being approved for use in the United States.”

There’s only one band available for sale in the United States, whereas worldwide, there are many different brands, he continued.

Dr. Spiegel says Twelve Oaks is an ideal place for bariatric surgery because of the compassionate care patients receive from hospital

staff, and because of the various specialists available to help with the patient’s care before, during and after surgery. These include the bariatric surgeon, cardiologists, gastroenterologists, pulmonary specialists, plastic surgeons, psychologists and dieticians, among others. He said Twelve Oaks Wellness Center, managed by two women

who have had bariatric surgery themselves, also provides tremendous support for patients.

“This multidisciplinary team approach for treating obese individuals helps ensure that they achieve their weight-loss goals, and that makes them happy,” he said. “It changes their lives forever.”

Surgery corrects skin problems following massive weight loss

A lower body lift was an almost unheard of procedure a few years ago, says Dr. John LoMonaco, a plastic surgeon who practices at Twelve Oaks Medical Center. “It’s an extreme surgery, no doubt about it,” he says of the six- to eight-hour procedure performed to correct the excess skin that massive weight loss often causes.



Dr. John LoMonaco

The decision of insurance companies to cover weight loss



surgery has given rise to what Dr. LoMonaco describes as a new subspecialty of plastic

surgery: extensive plastic surgery procedures needed to correct the resulting skin problems.

“This is not beauty surgery,” he says. “These patients have significant disturbance of their body image, and can have infections and skin breakdown as well.” Large amounts of excess skin also affect how well clothing fits, and it can cause frustration in patients who have worked hard to lose weight, he added.

“It’s a reminder of their former selves,” says Dr. LoMonaco, “and that’s a problem for patients as they struggle to begin their new, healthier lives.”

The surgery requires a dedicated surgical team who must re-position the patient two or three times during the surgery while maintaining adequate body temperature at all times. The two- or three-day hospitalization also requires specialized nursing care, as most patients are not allowed to sit for the first 24 to 36 hours after surgery. “The recovery is typically more involved than their original weight loss procedure,” says Dr. LoMonaco, “but I’ve never worked with a more grateful and appreciative group of patients.”