

Focus on the mental health of young obesity surgery patients

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Research from Lund University in Sweden shows that one in five adolescents who have undergone obesity surgery experience poor mental health. Some have even had suicidal thoughts. The study is based on follow-up studies of 88 adolescents who have undergone obesity surgery.

"It is extremely important that the focus of healthcare providers is not limited to their patients' physical well-being", says psychologist Kajsa Järholm.

Psychologically speaking, [adolescents](#) who are considered for [obesity surgery](#) are a very vulnerable group. Most of them are cared for both physically and mentally, but there are those who suffer after the surgery: they are depressed and some of them experience thoughts of suicide.

The studies are among the most extensive follow-ups ever made concerning the [mental health](#) in adolescents who have undergone obesity surgery: 88 Swedish participants with a former average BMI of 45.

Kajsa Järholm has mapped the patients' psychological well-being before surgery, four months after, and again another two years after surgery.

"At the first follow-up, most of them were feeling better", says Kajsa Järholm. "Right after the surgery, they experience a type of euphoria when the pounds start dropping after years of mental and physical problems due to them being overweight".

Kajsa Järholm argues that it's not until the two-year follow-up that you get a real indication of what the future will be like. And at this time, 14 per cent experience [suicidal thoughts](#) and 13 per cent report symptoms of major depression.

Is there a way to find out which persons will not be helped by the surgery?

"It is important to emphasise that they all feel better physically after the surgery. As for their mental well-being, we have seen that those who are in the worst state of mental health before the surgery are also those who continue to suffer", says Kajsa Järholm.

The surgical treatment performed on obese adolescents is currently in a trial phase, on the initiative of the Swedish county councils. The results of Kajsa Järholm's study are therefore important in terms of how to proceed in the future.

Her main conclusion is that if obesity surgery is to be part of what is considered basic healthcare, follow-ups must also be performed to evaluate the patients' [psychological well-being](#) two years after the surgery.

"Obesity is often more difficult for young people than for adults. Therefore, there's a difference in developing obesity as an adult, and doing so while growing up", says Kajsa Järholm, who believes that all adolescents who undergo obesity surgery must be screened in terms of their state of mental health.

More information: Järholm, K (2016). Mental Health in Adolescents Undergoing Bariatric Surgery: Psychological Outcomes Four Months and Two Years after Gastric Bypass lucris.lub.lu.se/ws/files/1103...

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