

# The hopes, fears and realities of weight loss surgery

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The statistics tell us that rates of gastric banding and other weight loss surgery are rising steeply, yet very little is known about the experiences of people who undergo it.

A [research project](#) led by Flinders University is looking to interview people who have lap-band and other forms of [bariatric surgery](#), both before and after their procedures, in order to understand their motives and expectations, experiences of [surgery](#) and changes to their quality of life over time.

Dr Darlene McNaughton of the Department of Public Health at Flinders said that [weight-loss surgery](#) is growing in popularity around the world, including in developing nations, as well as in Australia. There were just over 300 such procedures performed in Adelaide in 2001; in 2013 the figure was more than 1400.

Men, who are often resistant to dietary and [weight-loss](#) programs, are also turning to surgery in growing numbers.

"Surgery is becoming a much more palatable and much more available option for people with regards to weight loss, but it has its problems and its limitations," Dr McNaughton said.

The qualitative study adds a second "wing" to ongoing research: Flinders researchers are already involved in a quantitative study of weight loss surgery with clinicians and hospitals, which is providing data about the number and nature of the procedures being undertaken, and is also allowing surgical outcomes to be tracked over time.

"What we don't know is what people's actual experiences of it are," Dr McNaughton said.

"Does it change their lives, does it change their lives in positive ways and what are the things that are not so positive about it, and how are they feeling about it?"

As well as gaining a perspective on weight loss surgery through the patient's eyes, the research aims to improve the range, availability and adequacy of services to provide information, intervention and support.

Long waits for the limited places for surgery in the public system are also attended by a demanding medical process to "qualify", Dr McNaughton said, adding another factor that builds on hopes and fears.

The project will interview people during the three months leading up to their surgery, covering issues such as mobility, social life and perceptions of body size

"We want to find out what their quality of life is like before the surgery, then we speak to them at three months, nine months and 12 months following surgery, and probably at the two year mark."

Dr McNaughton said the two years around surgery could see major changes, but also great variations, in the amount and types of food consumed, as well as losses in body weight.

"It's a surgical intervention, and while bands can be removed, the other surgeries that are becoming increasingly popular are permanent. With obesity highly stigmatised in Australia, we want to know what the surgical option is doing for people."

**More information:** Anyone interested in participating in the research should phone 0488 551 747.

Provided by Flinders University

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