

A WEIGHTY ISSUE

BASED ON THE LATEST NATIONAL HEALTH SURVEY RESULTS, 1 IN 10 PEOPLE IN Singapore is obese – obesity defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or more. (BMI is calculated using the following formula: $BMI = \text{weight (kg)} / \text{height (m)}^2$.) Adults aged 30 to 39 make up the most obese group at 12.2 per cent.

Thankfully, there are various weight loss techniques to help those who are obese. For those with severe obesity (a BMI between 35 and 40) or “morbid” obesity (a BMI higher than 40), weight loss surgery – or bariatric surgery – is a possible option.

LAP-BAND surgery, also known as laparoscopic gastric banding, is one of the types of surgeries available. In this surgery, an adjustable silicone elastomer band – designed to limit food intake – is surgically placed around the stomach. By creating a smaller gastric pouch, the LAP-BAND System limits the amount of food that the stomach will hold at any time. The inflatable ring controls the flow of food from this smaller pouch to the rest of the digestive tract. The patient will feel comfortably full with a small amount of food. And because of the slow emptying, the patient will continue to feel full for several hours, reducing the urge to eat between meals. When you eat less food, your body draws on its own fat reserves to get the energy it needs. The result is you lose weight.

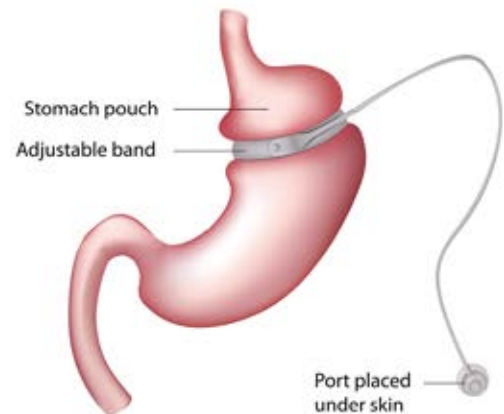
The surgical procedure itself is straightforward: The idea behind the operation is to create a small pouch in the upper part of the stomach with a controlled and adjustable stoma, without stapling, thus limiting food intake. A gastric band device is introduced through tiny (1cm) incisions in the abdomen and is placed around the upper part of the stomach. The resulting pouch (or the “new stomach”) dramatically reduces the functional capacity of the stomach. The band has a balloon from the inside that is adjustable and can reduce stoma size, thus prolonging the period of fullness.

The operation is performed under general anaesthesia and can last between 30 minutes and an hour. The band is fitted around the uppermost part of the stomach, forming a 15cc small pouch. It is designed so that it can be inflated or deflated at any time after the operation. This helps the patient continually lose weight until they reach their goals. LAP-BAND procedures typically result in a loss of 35-45% of excess weight.

There are several advantages to LAP-BAND surgery.

- **The process is less invasive:** Of the surgeries used to treat obesity, the one used to place the LAP-BAND System causes the least trauma. There is no need for cutting or stapling the stomach. Also, the LAP BAND System can usually be placed laparoscopically. With this surgery, it's possible to avoid large incisions and scars.
- **The band is adjustable:** With the LAP-BAND System, the amount of food you can eat at one time can often be changed without more surgery. This can be done simply by inflating or deflating the band.

Adjustable Gastric Band (Lap Band)



- **Changes can be reversed:** If need be, the LAP-BAND System can be removed. When it is, the stomach generally returns to its original form. In general, it's easier to remove the LAP-BAND System than it is to reverse other procedures.
- **Less hospital time is needed:** Patients normally leave the hospital between one and three days after laparoscopic surgery.
- **Recovery time is reduced:** After the procedure, patients usually return to their normal activities within a week or two. It may take four weeks or more if the procedure is not done laparoscopically or if there are complications.

To find out if you are suitable for LAP-BAND surgery, seek the advice of a medical professional. ■

