

November 22, 2011

Ask the Expert: Weight Loss, Obesity and Weight Center Programs

Expert: Mitch Gitkind, MD

Mitch Gitkind, MD, is the Medical Director of the [UMass Memorial Weight Center](#) and a clinical associate professor of medicine and surgery at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. A graduate of UMass Medical School, he trained at UMass Memorial (though it was known then as Worcester Memorial Hospital). Dr. Gitkind oversees the comprehensive services at the Weight Center, which has helped thousands of patients change their lives through lifestyle-based programs and [bariatric surgery](#).

Question: *I have an ileostomy x 20 years and I am overweight. I have difficulty with fresh fruits and veggies. And I am not a candidate for surgery because of scar tissue. What can the hospital's program do for me?*

Patients who've had previous surgeries can usually have weight loss surgery but each situation needs to be looked at carefully, including medical records to know for sure. In terms of a lifestyle-based program, the Weight Center has a full staff of devoted caregivers who can give expert nutrition and exercise advice, as well as professional support to help turn your changes into permanent habits. Coming to our [orientation meetings](#) and then meeting with one of our doctors would be the best place for you to start.

Question: *What are the stats for patients keeping the weight off and for how long after the gastric bypass surgery. It seems to me that a significant percentage of these patients gain back most of the weight after 2-3 years. Of the patients that we; have most have gained back a significant amount weight. So with that in mind why would I have the surgery versus another form of weight loss for a possible 2 year weight loss and then am left with other side effects.*

The data on long-term maintenance of weight loss after gastric bypass is excellent and is based on following very large numbers of patients for long time periods. That said, people who are likely to do well start with (or develop during preparation) strong dieting skills and a plan for exercise. We review all the numbers at our orientation meetings. Weight loss surgery is not for everyone, but for patients who make the choice and put in the effort, the results are superior to any other approach in terms of sustained weight loss and impact on weight-related medical problems.

Question: *I am 5 feet tall; have sleep apnea and my weight has fluctuated from 189 to 182 in spite of exercising and meal portioning. I have carried this weight since 2005 and the Sleep Lab doctor tells me I need to lose 30 pounds of FAT to get off the CPAP machine (which I dread every night). Please tell me how I can jumpstart weight loss; or what am I doing wrong? Thank you.*

This is a very common question and it's an important one for sure. Like many people, you feel like you're doing the right things but not getting the results you want. At the Weight Center we follow recommendations of the [United States Preventative Services Task Force](#) and offer multidisciplinary, high intensity programs that take your specific challenges into account. The first thing that would be helpful would be doing food and activity logs and going over them with a professional weight loss dietitian and also an exercise physiologist—both are available in our program, and they're ready to help you!

Question: *How invasive is weight loss surgery? What are the risks associated with it?*

The types of Weight loss surgery done at UMass Memorial are FDA-approved and very low risk. Most of our surgeries are done laparoscopically (minimally invasively) . We explain complications and risk issues at our [orientation meetings](#) and one-on-one appointments. It's important to talk not just about risks of surgery, but also risks of remaining overweight—and the dangerous medical issues that can come with it.

Question: *Does bariatric surgery decrease your chance of getting pregnant afterwards?*

Many severely overweight women experience fertility problems to begin with, and these often improve with weight loss. After weight loss surgery women are asked to delay conception for a period of time (how long depends on the type of surgery) but interestingly, the pregnancy risks related to surgery are generally lower than risks related to obesity. Again, specifics on this will vary person to person and can be discussed with a Weight Center doctor.

Question: *How is non-surgery weight loss option different from seeing a nutritionist, dieting and going to the gym? Does insurance typically cover non-surgical weight loss treatments at UMass?*

Great question. The major differences are the experience level of the health care providers and the research-proven basis of the content of our program. Also, we have a whole team of experts who work together to coordinate care, which is different than a situation where a person is working with a dietitian in one place and personal trainer in another, etc. Insurance covers some components of programs we offer, but there are out-of-pocket costs that are all explained at our orientation meetings. I wish insurance coverage was better!

Question: *I don't have any medical problems but my doctor tells me I'm about 15 pounds overweight and I'd like to lose that weight. Is the Weight Center the best place for me to come, or could I look at something like Weight Watchers or Jenny Craig in my neighborhood?*

UMass Memorial Weight Center specializes in treating people with weight problems that are causing, or will be likely to cause, medical issues like sleep apnea, diabetes, high blood pressure, and cholesterol problems. Most of our patients are looking to lose 50 pounds or more, sometimes a lot more, and our programs are designed to give these people the best chance at success.

Question: *I'm afraid that even if I have weight loss surgery; I will go back to my old eating habits and gain the weight back.....how do I get the support to help post-surgery?*

This is a very important question. At the UMass Memorial Weight Center, one of our most important goals (and I have to say we do a very good job with it!) is helping patients, along with their PCPs and other providers, decide whether weight loss surgery is a good fit. One of the most important issues, as you point out, is whether the patient is likely to stick with diet and physical activity goals long term. This is where our multidisciplinary team and our preparation program (we call it our "Surgical Track") comes in. By assessing your vulnerabilities, helping you try out changes well before surgery, and looking for improvements in your health and your weight, we can get a very good idea of how you'll do afterward. Come to one of our orientation meetings to hear more detail on this exact issue, after which we can discuss your specific situation at a medical intake appointment.

Question: *Is bariatric surgery as safe for children as adults? Are there studies, research, resources available on this that you can provide as I begin looking in to this for my son? I'd like to have as much knowledge and education on this as possible before we discuss with physicians.*

UMass Memorial Weight Center treats adults (over 18 years of age) only. For information on weight loss treatments for children, I'd suggest starting with your pediatrician and looking for a referral to a dietitian or referral to a pediatric weight program. Weight loss surgery for adolescents is done in some centers but less is known about long term effects.

Question: *My pulmonologist and rheumatologist seem to think I should hold off on weight loss surgery because of my medication, Prednisone 10 mg daily; it slows healing, they tell me. Should this be a concern?*

Your doctors are correct that the need for certain kinds of medications can affect your risk related to weight loss surgery. That said, we've successfully treated many patients taking the medication you refer to. I'd suggest coming to one of our [orientation meetings](#) to hear about the surgical as well as non-surgical programs, and if surgery sounds like something you'd like to take a closer look at, coming in to meet with one of our doctors. We can be much more specific about risk issues after reviewing your entire medical history and the predicted duration of your medication regimen.

Thank you to all who participated in our "Ask the Expert" session. These were all great questions and we hope you have found the answers to be helpful and informative. If you have any questions regarding our Weight Center, programs and services offered or meeting and orientations schedule, please visit the [Weight Center website](#) or contact us via [Facebook](#) or [@umassmemorial](#) on Twitter.

For more information about our Ask the Expert sessions and for upcoming expert/topics, please visit www.umassmemorial.org/asktheexpert

Resources:

- [Mitchell Gitkind, MD, Medical Director of UMass Memorial Weight Center](#)
- [UMass Memorial Weight Center](#)
- [Bariatric surgery](#)
- [Weight Center Meetings and Discussion Groups](#)
- [Determining BMI](#)

Join a Weight Center Orientation Meeting! [Register now](#) or call 888-358-6277 for information.

Schedule

The Orientation Meeting is held on the first Friday afternoon or fourth Thursday evening of the month:

Friday afternoon meeting, noon to 1 pm: December 2: Hiatt Auditorium

Thursday evening meeting, 6 to 7 pm: December 22: Hiatt Auditorium

Location

Weight Center

UMass Memorial Medical Center - University Campus

55 Lake Avenue North, Worcester, MA 01655