

Anyone who thinks weight loss is simple should talk to Dr Anish Nagpal. As a doctor working with people who want to lose weight with the help of surgery, he knows all about the complexities of eating and weight gain.

Let's start with emotional eating. It's not just something that happens after a bad day – it can also be related to stressful life events, sometimes stretching as far back as childhood.

Surgery is only a tool, not a cure - patients still need to adopt a healthy diet and exercise programme to help ensure their surgery is a success.

How overweight must you be to qualify for bariatric surgery, as it's called? The criterion is a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 40 or more or a BMI of 35, plus a health problem like diabetes that would improve with weight loss - and a low risk for surgery. For anyone with both type 2 diabetes and obesity, the case for bariatric surgery is strong. Studies suggest that many people no longer need diabetes medication after surgery – although this depends partly on how well they stick to exercising and improving their diet.

Although the surgery reduces appetite and increases the feeling of satisfaction from even a small meal, it's still possible for people to overeat.

All bariatric operations can be beaten if patients eat soft or liquid kilojoules like cheese, ice-cream and sweet or milky drinks. A critical part of looking after someone who's had this surgery is getting them to focus on healthy eating. It's important that patients learn to eat good quality food, and avoid many of the choices that helped cause their weight problem.

There are also some people who've never tried to lose weight on their own so we prescribe a healthy eating plan and exercise to get them started. Making lifestyle changes will keep them on track after surgery. Obesity isn't just about personal choice. It can be about genetic dispositions that influence brain chemistry and appetite. Put them together with environments that make it easy to overeat and be inactive and you've got a perfect storm for obesity.

“We also need to re-think our attitude to fast food like we have with drink driving. Years ago it was okay to drink and drive; now if someone tries to do that we take the keys off them because our views have changed. The same needs to happen with diet, we need to encourage an attitude that says healthy eating – not fast food – is the norm.” – **Dr Anish Nagpal**