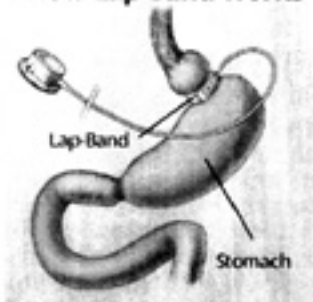


The safest weight-loss surgery

It's become a popular choice for the very overweight: surgery that uses a band instead of a scalpel to make the stomach smaller. The reason? Lap-Band (Laparoscopic Adjustable Gastric Banding Procedure), as it's called, is safer, cheaper and may be just as effective as gastric bypass, according to experts. Interested? Here's what you need to know:

What it is: A 40-minute outpatient surgery, done under general anesthesia, which requires only a small incision to place an inflatable band around the upper part of the stomach and make it smaller. "The now golf-ball-size pouch holds much less food, so you feel full fast and eat much less," says Christine Ren, M.D., director of the New York University Program for Surgical Weight Loss. You need only return to the surgeon's office three to five times the following year to have the band adjusted with injections of saline.

How Lap-Band works



An inflatable silicone band is placed around the uppermost part of the stomach, making the stomach pouch smaller.

Why it's safer than bypass: There's almost no risk of complications, a University of Chicago study found. "Surgeons are simply placing a band around the stomach, not cutting the stomach and intestines in two and reconnecting the parts, as with gastric bypass," explains Dr. Ren.

Big health benefits: Obese adults shed, on average, 45% of their excess weight two years after being fitted with a gastric band, which dramatically reduced their risk of obesity-related diseases, according to Emory University researcher Hadar Spivak, M.D. For example, after the surgery:

- 73% of patients with GERD were symptom-free.
- 64% of patients with high cholesterol no longer needed medication.
- 33% of the patients with diabetes were able to stop taking insulin.

Who's a candidate? People carrying 100 or more extra pounds, 75 extra pounds if they have diabetes or high blood pressure.

● **Cost:** From \$12,000 to \$20,000 (compared to \$25,000 or more for gastric bypass). And about 40% of insurers now cover it.

—Peg Verone