

► Improved Surgery Brings Host of Benefits to Weight-Loss Patients

Support for bariatric surgery keeps building, as the list of benefits grows. Evidence for positive and protective effects on heart disease, high blood pressure, and especially type 2 diabetes, are well known. Now, a nationwide study of Medicare patients, reported this spring in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, showed that surgery for severe obesity significantly reduced all-cause mortality, as well as incidence of new-onset heart failure, myocardial infarction, and stroke. In addition, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* released a study this June that associated bariatric surgery with a significantly lower incidence of obesity-related cancer and cancer-related mortality.

“At the same time, we’ve refined best approaches and techniques for this surgery so that we can offer patients the intervention that most fits their needs,” said Virtua bariatric surgeon Emeka Acholonu, MD, FACS, FASMBS. “The effectiveness of sleeve gastrectomy, with the option of adding modified duodenal switch for patients who need it to achieve targeted weights, has given us the best set of offerings ever in the field.”

Simplified Surgery for Greater Weight Loss

In recent years, sleeve gastrectomy has proved preferable over other bariatric surgery procedures, such as gastric banding and gastric bypass. The procedure removes about 80% of the stomach, reducing it to the shape of a banana. Patients experience fullness much more quickly. But for some patients, including severely obese individuals, additional surgical intervention is needed to further enhance weight loss. A refinement of the duodenal switch procedure is seen as highly effective for this need.

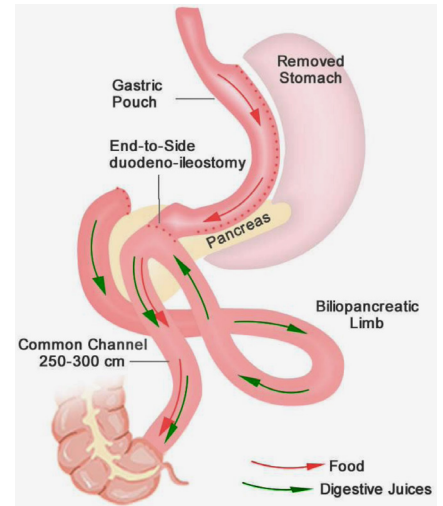
Modified duodenal switch (ModDS or SADI—single anastomosis duodenoileostomy) severs the connection of most of the upper intestine to the stomach and bypasses this small bowel (while re-establishing its connection to the biliary system) to create entry for the reduced stomach contents at a lower portion of the bowel (see figure). Virtua is one of the

few accredited bariatric programs in the region to offer this simplified version of duodenal switch.

To achieve the biliopancreatic diversion, the traditional duodenal switch requires a second segment of the small intestine to separately conduct digestive juices via a transection and a second anastomosis to the lower bowel. Thus, ModDS is a simpler surgery with less chance of complications or nutritional deficiency

(due to preserving more of the small intestine). With switch surgery, patients have a reduced ability to absorb calories and less risk of dumping (compared to gastric bypass), because the pylorus muscle is preserved.

Modified duodenal switch



Robotics Add Precision, Ease Recovery

“Though we can do bariatric operations laparoscopically, we perform almost all weight-loss procedures using robotic surgery, because it gives us more precision and it eases postoperative effects for patients,” said Virtua bariatric surgeon Srikanth Parsi, MD, FACS.

Patients qualify if they have a BMI of ≥ 40 or a BMI of >35 with certain related medical conditions. Dietary and lifestyle changes are required before and after surgery. Patients are typically in the hospital for 24 hours and the resulting weight loss begins within weeks. Daily vitamin and mineral supplements are important after surgery.

Bariatric surgery may also address infertility, sleep apnea, severe reflux (via gastric bypass), and, of course, orthopedic risk. It is almost uniformly effective in allowing patients to lose the majority of excess weight and become more active.

To reach a Virtua bariatric navigator, call 856-246-4155.

Of Equal Importance: Patient Support Before, During, After

Virtua's bariatric surgery program has presented data nationally showing that patients who participate in its Facebook support group page have superior resolution of comorbidities and better reduction in BMI postoperatively. The findings are just one example of why the bariatrics field sees support for patients before, during, and after surgery as important to success as the surgery itself. With proper physical and emotional preparation, guidance through the procedure, and coaching across the follow-up and longer-term phases, patients dependably achieve their weight-loss goals.

Few bariatrics programs have developed their support programs as extensively, and with as much practice, as Virtua. A dedicated navigation team leads patients through the process, starting with scheduling of necessary preoperative appointments and testing, including in cardiology, pulmonology, and gastroenterology.

When patients have completed the free bariatric information session, had their initial appointment with a surgeon, and received approval to start surgery preparations, their weight-loss journey is under way. Surgeons and the program's clinical psychologist connect with patients throughout the process. In the weeks leading up to surgery, a nurse navigator instructs the patient in a preoperative education class. Program materials provide further in-depth information, including a step-by-step timeline of the patient experience.

The process heading to the day of surgery takes four to six months to complete, and the team conducts the insurance approval that requires the 90-day weight-loss program built into this period. Registered dietitians on Virtua's weight management nutrition team provide counseling and a variety of support groups, as patients transition quickly back to solid foods and a rigorous post-surgery diet,

during which they can follow up with the nutrition team in the months and years after the surgery, as needed. An exercise program begins about a month after surgery.

"Our program stands out in each of these phases," said Lisa Shaw, MBA, MSN, RN, CBN, Virtua director of Digestive Health/Bariatric Surgery, a program accredited through the Metabolic Bariatric Surgery Accredited Quality Improvement Program (MBSAQIP). "Through our clinical navigation team, we make a tremendous effort at partnering with patients, in a way not found in most bariatrics programs."

Attending monthly support group meetings can be important to success. Patients also share and encourage one another through the program's private Facebook group. Launched in 2014, the group now includes more than 2,000 members.

"It's a challenging process for these patients who are going through a world of change, but the more embedded in the program they are, the more success they have over the long term," said Shaw. "They deserve all the support we can give because the result is life transforming."



Bariatric surgeon Emeka Acholonu, MD, discusses successful results of weight-loss care with Kristi Slifko (center), who lost 138 lbs., and Janice Vindick (right), who lost 70 pounds. The two friends underwent the sleeve gastrectomy procedure at Virtua.