

Getting Out There

Dating Following Weight Loss Surgery

by Barbara Thompson

“We’re ready to live,” announces Cindy Eversoll of Omaha, NE. Cindy has never been married and is now having a wonderful time dating. At her heaviest, Cindy weighed 360 pounds. She is now a stunning 32-year-old. At 5’ 10” tall, she weighs 175 pounds, 10 pounds below her goal weight. Her long brown hair and gorgeous face go with her new, fit body. “It all has to do with getting your confidence up.” When she first starting dating following her surgery, Cindy was eager and grateful for any offer of a date, but no longer. Cindy confidently explains, “Now I date someone 2 or 3 times and I am able to judge if the guy is worth spending my time with. If he’s not, I move on. I take the initiative now. I have the confidence to approach someone who looks interesting. I like myself now and I like the way I look.”

Cindy is learning what many other people who have had gastric bypass surgery are learning: that dating may be fun, yet for some it can be a frightening emotional challenge. But weight loss surgery patients are up for the challenge.

It is estimated that 140,000 people will have weight loss surgery this year. That may sound like a lot until you realize that more than 6 million people qualify.



Certainly a lack of insurance coverage is an overriding reason for not having the surgery. However, a secondary reason must surely be a lack of courage. It is frightening to face weight loss surgery, not really knowing how it will affect our everyday life forever. Yet, those of us who have the surgery are willing to embark on the unknown. We are a very courageous bunch. We grab life and venture beyond our comfort zone. We have the courage to do those things that we have been missing for so long because our weight has limited us. We eagerly accept the physical and emotional challenges because we are not content with our lives as being morbidly obese. And one of the most frightening of the emotional challenges, for those who are single, involves getting back into the social world. It is no wonder why dating following surgery is such an issue.

“I date an entirely different class of men since my surgery,” says Becky Dotson of Ocala, FL. Becky went from a size 24/26 and 255 pounds to a size 4/6 and 130 pounds. “I felt like I was a door mat before my surgery. I would accept any way that I was treated and believed that no one else would love me. Since my surgery I decide who I want to date. I can pick and chose, and I love the way I am treated.”

Issues of intimacy are near the top of the list of difficulties to deal with following surgery. Many people are left with a slimmer body encased in pounds of hanging skin. While clothes can often mask the problem, when intimate, those issues must be faced.

"I also find that men will take me out publicly more often," admits Becky. "When I dated before, I seemed to be in relationships in which it was just the two of us. We had no friends, and we wouldn't go out. The men I date now want to go out all the time. I guess they are showing me off instead of hiding me because they were ashamed of me. It's really sad how society is."

Following surgery, self-esteem rises with each pound lost. It is the issue of low self-esteem that allowed so many morbidly obese people to stay in relationships that were unhealthy.

Becky also is enjoying all the attention that she is getting. "The man I am dating right now is very jealous of all the attention that I receive. In fact, it is making him so uncomfortable that I don't think our relationship will survive it." But Becky has been without positive attention for so long that she is enjoying every minute of it.

But excessive attention may be something that not everyone enjoys, as Robyn Posson of Schenectady, NY discovered. Robyn is 45 years old, has been divorced for 22 years and has just begun her weight loss journey, having lost 73 pounds. During her 22 years of being single, she was involved in one very unhealthy relationship that ended 8 years ago. Apart from that, she has been on her own. Robyn teaches counseling and is a professional at a community college. She is now thinking about getting out there again. "I am confident in my professional life. I am used to getting attention because of something I do professionally, but the attention that I am getting now is personal. It's not based on who I am inside."

Men are starting to flirt with Robyn and she finds it unnerving. "I went out with my daughter to a club where a friend of my daughter's was playing. They were having swing dancing lessons. That was the first time I have been close to a man in years. I felt awkward. I felt like a thirteen-year-old. I just didn't know what to do."

Whether to tell your date that you have had weight loss surgery also should be considered. Cindy started to

tell her dates soon after her surgery. She felt she had to explain, because she was concerned that they would notice how little she was eating. She found that her dates were fascinated by her story and for the most part didn't care because of how good she looks now. However, she thinks she may have scared at least one date off by telling him. Now that she is so far post-op, she eats more normally and doesn't feel compelled to blurt out her medical history as soon as she meets someone. "I wait to tell people until I get to know them a little better now," she says.

"It's so much a part of who I am", says Becky Dotson "that I tell everyone. I even show pictures of when I was heavy. People seem to really admire how far I have come."

Issues of intimacy are near the top of the list of difficulties to deal with following surgery. Many people are left with a slimmer body encased in pounds of hanging skin. While clothes can often mask the problem, when intimate, those issues must be faced. "I would be mortified to be intimate with a man right now," confesses Robyn. "It is just not something that I am ready for right now."

Kellie Ricker of San Jose, CA has gone from 327 pounds to 160 pounds, and at 5 feet 5 inches fits easily into a size 12 dress. Although she looks wonderful, she is not comfortable with her body. "I was invited to go hot tubing. I really wanted to go, but I don't dare get into a bathing suit," she admits.

Kellie takes a very philosophical approach to dating. She says, "I have experienced some very interesting things since having had my surgery and going back out into the dating world; from my own self-image and what I would consider acceptable from men, to how real men, the nice ones, find me attractive now and approach me." Kellie says there is such a difference in how we behave when we are heavy and how much abuse we will accept. She compares this to when we have our self-esteem and our confidence back following weight loss surgery. "When we lose weight, we

Following surgery, self-esteem rises with each pound lost. It is the issue of low self-esteem that allowed so many morbidly obese people to stay in relationships that were unhealthy.

begin to carry ourselves in a different way. Confidence is a great attraction.”

“My world has gotten larger as I have gotten smaller,” Kellie adds. “I bought a new home, I bought a new car. I got a new job. I’m in a happy place.”

Yet there is a feeling of universal sadness from many of the women that I spoke with when recognizing how differently people treat those who are slim opposed to those who are heavy. Kellie expressed it when she spoke of her current mate and his reaction when he saw pictures of her weighing over 300 pounds. “I said to him, ‘You wouldn’t have spoken to me when I was that heavy,’ and he said, ‘I love you dearly, but no I wouldn’t.’ It’s horrible the way society treats us,” admitted Kellie.

And yet, we may be our own worst enemy. “When I was heavy before my surgery,” admits Cindy, “I would never be associated with other heavy people. I felt that I was getting too much attention myself. I didn’t want anyone thinking, ‘there goes 2 fat chicks’. Now that I am thin, I have the confidence to accept and associate with people no matter what their size. I’m not proud of it, but that’s the way I thought.”

Thousands of people will face dating after weight loss surgery, and there are no guarantees that all will go well. Expect that you may stumble and fall and even choose wrong mates. It is hard to break old habits. And being thin is also not a guarantee that you will have a healthy and happy relationship. Thin people have bad relationships and divorces also. But for many, after so many years of having low self-esteem, the opportunities for relationships based on different terms, is intriguing, as well as healthy.

Being in a relationship is a normal process of the human condition. And the adage that “to truly love someone else, you must first love yourself,” can give many of us renewed hope for a stable and satisfying relationship in our lives. ■



So for those who feel ready to face that world, here are some things to consider before jumping into a dating situation:

Take your time

Don’t rush into a relationship. Take your time and understand what you are doing. Many of us are accustomed to settling for what we can get and being grateful for affection. We have sometimes accepted bad treatment. Wait for your self-esteem to rise so that you are not settling for yet another destructive relationship.

Do some planning

Think some things through. Are you going to tell a date that you had surgery? Is this a personal piece of information that you want to share immediately, or would you be more comfortable waiting until you know the person better and feel that the relationship will go beyond one date? There is no correct answer except what is comfortable for you.

Be up front with your mate and yourself

Although your prospective mate might not notice that you are eating smaller portions, life after surgery is about more than food. There are additional issues that need to be discussed such as feelings of self-esteem and embarrassment over intimacy. You may find that what is an issue for you does not matter to your mate.

Get counseling

If you feel that you are making bad choices or if you are not able to come to terms with many of the personal issues that accompany dating, seek professional help. Counseling can help you to sort through many of the causes of your feelings so that you can work toward a healthy and happy relationship.



Barbara Thompson is the author of the popular patient guidebook, *Weight Loss Surgery; Finding the Thin Person Hiding Inside You*. She is a nationally recognized speaker, and sponsors the patient website: www.wslcenter.com

T r a n s f o r m Y o u r s e l f

Make a serious transformation.

If you're serious about taking control of your life,
the LivLite Surgical
Weight Loss Program is ready to help you.



Kristin Duncan

LivLite offers the most comprehensive surgical weight loss program available.

Our onsite program managers assist you from your first consultation all the way through post-op support groups.

The National Institutes of Health have determined that surgical weight loss is an effective solution for morbid obesity.

If you are severely overweight, then let us help you make your personal transformation a reality.



Lost 160 lbs.

LivLiteSM
Surgical Weight Loss Program

The Surgical Solution for Serious Weight Loss

1.877.Liv.Lite www.liv-lite.com

Accepted by most insurance plans