



Controlling Emotional Challenges.

It's been long understood that our physical state and emotional make-up are directly related. Which means one can affect the other. At times it can be beyond our control. Still, at other times we can "set the tone" with our own thinking, in ways that benefit the healing process. So when possible, we want to work at controlling the emotional challenges that are certain to accompany the physical after-effects of weight loss surgery. How can we do this?

One way is to establish a balanced, realistic view of our own expectations.

It's normal and healthy to have expectations regarding, recovery, eating patterns, and other surgery-related lifestyle changes. However, problems arise when too much is expected from the weight loss. For instance, people who view their weight loss as an automatic ticket to true happiness, the perfect mate, or a quick fix to a troubled marriage are setting themselves up for emotional disappointment. It could very well help with these things, but the work is still there to do.

A healthier approach then, is to build on the weight loss by setting realistic goals where you have some control over the outcome. View the weight loss as a tool to help you work towards your goals. Visualize them, and meditate on how your new healthier body will allow you to better achieve them. And remember, stay focused on what you've accomplished, not what you haven't. Look for progress daily, regardless of how small it might be.

The fact is, bariatric patients still need to maintain a program of diet and exercise just like everyone else if they want to maintain a normal weight –And yes, that means sacrifices.

The good news is your odds of success are greatly enhanced by the surgery. And over time, if the right frame of mind is maintained, those things that feel like sacrifices now, can become the things you really want to do. You'll learn to actually prefer taking a walk after dinner instead of flopping down on the couch for an evening of aimless channel-surfing. Or making a sugar-free snack instead of reaching for a 600-calorie wedge of cake. Eating smaller meals and knowing when to stop will eventually become second nature. You'll start to celebrate these changes in your lifestyle as outward signs of your success. Best of all, you'll start to see just how wonderfully realistic expectations can pay off. Both physically, and emotionally.

Another way to keep emotional challenges in check is to recognize them early. Anticipate them. Have a game plan ready to maintain a positive realistic outlook while keeping them in check. Here are some of the common emotional challenges that you can control.

- Changes in relationships
- Difficulty in dealing with change (even good ones).
- Cravings for former bad habits.
- Viewing food in a different, healthy light.
- Frustration with a dead-end job.
- New body-image concerns such as excess skin from weight loss.
- Fear of regaining lost weight.
- Dealing with dietary discipline at social gatherings.
- Extra effort of preparing healthy meals.
- The reality of regular exercise if it's viewed as a chore.
- Discomfort from increased attention from opposite gender.
- Personality changes.

And again, notice that these are all things that you have the ability to control at the emotional level. You can choose how you feel about them. It's not always easy, but as we all know, nothing worthwhile is. And isn't it also true that the list of emotional challenges *before* you took charge of your obesity was a much longer and far more challenging one?

Keep reminding yourself that you're never alone when you face these challenges. You have caring friends, family, and access to many others who have also had weight loss surgery. The Barix Forums on this website can provide an opportunity for open honest discussion with others who share similar challenges. They're all ready and eager to help you keep your expectations in a balanced perspective.

You may find that working with a therapist is right for you. You may also benefit by looking into the Pathway program at www.thepathway.org, a valuable support tool designed to help you overcome any harmful habits you continue to struggle with.

In many ways the most difficult emotional hurdle you've had to face is the surgery itself, wouldn't you agree? And now it's a thing of the past. Your present hurdles are no different. As you work to achieve your realistic expectations, your list of emotional challenges will continue to get shorter, and you'll continue to make the most of your new life.

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