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## Several Factors Come into Play When Making the Decision to Have Gastric Bypass Surgery

*By Chris J. Minnick*

(Las Cruces) -- When I first considered having the gastric bypass surgery a few months ago my first step was to learn as much about the surgery as I could. I found a lot of great information about all the aspects of the surgery on the Internet, but the information was technical and very impersonal. I knew the best advice would come from someone who went through the surgery.

Six years ago Amanda Lopez was where I am at now. She was obese, frustrated with yet another failed diet and scared that she would never be able to beat the disease. Her choice to have the gastric bypass surgery changed her life, and while she said most of the changes were positive some of the changes were very hard to deal with.

Amanda, who works as the school mental health advocate for the Department of Health in Las Cruces, said one of the biggest challenges was missing the food she once loved. Amanda is a self-admitted emotional eater. She uses food not just for nutrition, but also to relieve stress and celebrate life. That addiction caused her to be more than 180 pounds overweight by the time she was 30.

Amanda had her surgery on December 15, 2003. Just ten days later she had recovered from the surgery, but Christmas had arrived and instead of enjoying the holiday with her family, she was alone in her bedroom crying about the food in the next room she could no longer eat.

"It was like someone took an eraser and took out all the color from my life," Amanda said. "I was depressed for months because I could no longer eat the things I loved. Though I was already seeing the effects of the surgery and was losing weight, I was still sad. This went on for several months until I was able to adjust to the changes in my life."

As a food addict myself, this is not the kind of news I want to hear. The revelation from Amanda was almost enough to convince me not to have the surgery.

The other unexpected aspect of Amanda's surgery was the strain it put on her relationships. Since her surgery Amanda has divorced and has lost a few close friends. Amanda sees the loss of these relationships as a byproduct of the surgery.

"I lost a very good friend partly because of the attention I got after the surgery," Amanda said. "This was not just a casual friend, but someone who was a major part of my life for many years. It

was a hard pill to swallow when I realized that my choice to have the surgery and the changes I went through during the process drove that person away from me.”

Again, not the news I want to hear while I’m considering having the surgery. My wife is the most important person in my life. My close friends are as important to me as family. This, too, was almost enough to scare me away from the surgery.

Despite these negatives, I still want the surgery. I realized I have benefits that Amanda did not have. I have her to help me through this. With Amanda’s help I learned that I have to deal with my food addictions before I have the surgery and that I need to involve my friends and family in the process.

I started keeping a diary of all the food I eat to help me deal with my food addiction. I write down everything I eat during the day, but not just to record the calories, carbohydrates and fat. The most important part of the diary is the section that asks why I ate the meal. The results were shocking. I learned over the last two months most of the reason I eat a meal have nothing to do with hunger. Most have to do with stress, anger and happiness. The surgery will alter my digestive system, but not my mind. The addiction is something that I am trying to break long before I have the surgery.

In my next update I will write more about how I am fighting my food addiction and also about the series of medical tests and insurance hurdles you have to go through to have the surgery.

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