

Pre-surgical Psychological Evaluation



Bariatric surgery is a powerful tool in the treatment of obesity. Compared to other weight loss treatments, surgical intervention results in greater weight loss and increased likelihood of successful weight maintenance. However, surgery is a life-changing event and success can be affected by psychological issues or life stressors. As a result, undergoing a pre-surgical psychological evaluation is the standard of care. The purpose is to make sure there are no serious mental health conditions that contraindicate surgery. The evaluation also will help patients develop a plan to address smaller issues so that they can have the best chance for weight loss success and an improved quality of life.

What can I expect regarding the requirement for behavioral health acceptance?

Nationally, three out of four people are recommended right away for surgery. The others are usually recommended to undergo some behavioral health treatment to address existing issues that could negatively impact bariatric surgery success. These issues include substance abuse, binge eating, unstable mood disorders, or major life stressors. Most people who follow the recommendations and seek treatment go on to be re-evaluated and are cleared for bariatric surgery.

Addressing psychosocial issues before surgery is in your best interest. Poorly controlled mental health conditions are associated with less successful weight loss.

What happens in the psychological evaluation?

The evaluations occur over two to three sessions with a licensed psychologist.

Session One – Objective Testing: You will complete paper and pencil behavioral health screenings and several computer-based personality and behavioral assessments. (1-2 hours)

Session Two – Psychological Interview: The psychologist will ask you about a range of subject areas (weight history, psychiatric history, substance use, current life stressors) and assess your level of motivation and knowledge about bariatric surgery. (1-1.5 hours)

Session Three – Feedback: You will receive information as to whether or not you cleared the behavioral health portion completely or if the psychologist recommends a course of brief, targeted behavioral health treatments to address an issue that would likely interfere in a successful outcome. Rarely is a person told they never will be an appropriate candidate. Depending on the psychologist's recommendation, a patient may receive this feedback through a phone call. (30 minutes)

What can I do to prepare for the psychological evaluation?

Be yourself. Honesty is appreciated and required. The behavioral health providers have your best interests at heart, and you are in a safe and confidential environment.

Educate yourself. Motivation plays a big role in your outcome. The more educated you are about post-operative diet and lifestyle changes, the more you truly will understand what it takes to be successful with bariatric surgery.