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LAP-BAND surgery gives Kingston woman new look

By Kathryn Koch



The old Salwa Rizkalla struggled to lose weight and maintain her health, but the new Salwa has a new lease on life.

“I feel like a new person,” she said. “I’m healthy now.”

The Kingston resident had tried all kinds of diets from Weight Watchers to the Atkins Diet but was up and down with her weight. On top of this constant struggle, she had health problems related to blood pressure and was borderline diabetic.

Then she heard about LAP-BAND surgery.

Described as a minimally invasive surgical solution to long-term weight loss, Laparoscopic Gastric Banding reduces the stomach capacity and restricts the amount of food that can be consumed at one time. An adjustable silicone gastric band implanted around the upper part of the stomach during surgery can be tightened during a doctor’s office visit.

Since undergoing the surgery in May 2006, Rizkalla has lost 62 pounds. Her blood pressure is down, and she feels less pain in her legs and back. When she looks at her “before” picture on the refrigerator, she sees a different person. The double chin is missing.

“It was the best decision of my life,” she said.

Rizkalla said she couldn’t have other kinds of surgery, but after reading about LAP-BAND surgery started looking over the Internet for doctors who could perform it. She made an appointment with Dr. Arthur Glasgow, who works as a bariatric specialist at the Weight Loss Surgery Center at Caritas Norwood Hospital along with his son, Dr. Adam Glasgow.

When they met, Glasgow first determined whether she met the requirements for LAP-BAND surgery. He then scheduled a series of tests including a sleep apnea test to further determine if she was a candidate for the surgery.

Rizkalla said she’s sure she drove the doctor’s assistant nuts calling her all the time.

“If it was me, I would have hung up the phone on someone like me,” she said.

She was in a rush to have the surgery but was told to be patient. She had to lose some weight first. For 10 days she went on a liquid diet. Then she had to get over a high temperature. Finally, when she had gotten herself down to 271 pounds, she was ready for surgery. She said it took only one hour, and she never felt any side effects.

While his father was Rizkalla’s primary doctor, Adam Glasgow got to know Rizkalla and has watched as she has gained confidence as she has lost weight and feels better overall. He said she even talks to prospective patients, some of whom feel isolated and are grateful for a friend who understands.

Glasgow said patients must be at least 100 pounds over their ideal body weight measured by body mass index before they are considered for surgery. A person with a body mass index above 40 is considered morbidly obese and eligible for weight loss intervention. Illnesses directly related to being in the 35 to 40 bmi range include high blood pressure and sleep apnea. That’s why tests are required.

“The patients go through a tough evaluation that also includes a psychological profile, meeting with a nutritionist and check for sleep apnea,” he said.

The doctors inform a patient about the risks and benefits of the surgery and contact the patient’s insurance company to approve the procedure.

Glasgow said the surgery is the least important part of the whole process. It’s how patients use the LAP-BAND to lose weight that counts the most. This includes separating liquids and solids, eating less and making good food choices. Patients should stay away from ice cream and skip the

extra cream and sugar. Frequent follow-up is also required. As patients lose weight, the band can be tightened. It takes just a few minutes during a regular office visit.

Rizkalla sees Arthur Glasgow on a monthly basis and has taken his advice. She has lost an average of four pounds a month and follows the diet she was prescribed.

“I was in a rush to lose weight quickly, but he told me no,” she said.

She tries to avoid sweets and avoids soda. She can't drink water until at least half an hour after she eats so that her body will absorb the vitamins from her food instead of flowing through the band. When she feels full, she stops eating. She also exercises.

Adam Glasgow said the demand for the surgery led to his and his father's decision to supply it to eligible patients.

“We really became interested when our patients became interested,” he said.

Both took the necessary courses and after two years of training joined the bariatric program at Caritas Norwood Hospital. They are still in private practice while participating in a work exchange with the hospital. Last summer they received accreditation from the American College of Surgeons.

Rizkalla had been told she might have to stay home for two weeks after the surgery. She was back to work in a week. Rizkalla said the Glascoes, their assistant and everyone she has encountered at Caritas Norwood Hospital has been great to her through all the telephone calls, surgery and follow-up office visits. She would recommend the surgery to anyone struggling with their weight.

Rizkalla has lived in Kingston for 10 years after moving to town from Pembroke and before that Duxbury. For 20 years she worked at Sac's Pizza on Route 53 in Pembroke on the Duxbury line as an accountant.

She wants to lose another 40 pounds.