

# *Weight Loss Surgery:*

**The pitfalls and the proven plan to avoid them**



### Is weight loss surgery right for me?

Weight loss surgery is life changing. It's so effective at improving health and wellbeing that is now widely recognised as metabolic surgery.

It's a tool that changes how you eat and this facilitates weight loss. The changes are dramatic and it's best to be guided by a supportive team, including your surgeon, regular doctor and dietitian.

Take your time to think about your choices and to be confident that you choose the right surgery at the right time with the support of the right people.

Feel reassured that weight loss surgery is right for you if:

- Carrying extra weight is getting in the way of participating in a healthy and active life,
- You have run out of other weight loss options (ie you've tried everything and it's not working for you),
- You feel ready and able to be guided through the very important 90 day transition period,
- You are ready to live differently to get the most out of your life.



# Is an operation the best treatment for your health and wellbeing?

The decision to have an elective procedure is serious and complications can and sometimes occur. It is important to speak with your regular doctor about surgery as they are best placed to guide you with regard to your health and personal circumstances.

Your doctor (or specialist) will also need to organise your referral to see a surgeon who specialises in weight loss surgery. Check that your referral is correct and that your medical history and list of medications is up-to-date. Expect to rely on your specialist surgeon for long-term, follow up care. This long-term care should be shared with your regular doctor.

Before consulting with your surgeon it is a good idea to do a little background research yourself. Think about the type of operation that would best suit your health and lifestyle. In Australia since 2015, the most common operation performed has been the sleeve gastrectomy and gastric bypass, with less people having an adjustable gastric band. All of these operations are tools to assist with weight loss and health gain. However, the operation that is best for you depends on many factors including your surgical and medical history.

Two useful websites for this research are:

1) [www.asmbbs.org](http://www.asmbbs.org)

Visit the website of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery to learn more about treatment of obesity. Go to the "Patients" tab on the tool bar.

2) [www.anzmoss.com.au](http://www.anzmoss.com.au)

Visit the Australian and New Zealand Metabolic and Obesity Surgery Society website to check your eligibility for surgical intervention. Go to the "Obesity" tab on the tool bar and scroll down to "Am I a candidate?"

When you visit the surgeon, your medical, physical and mental health will be evaluated to best consider ways to prepare you for a safer operation. You need to be ready and willing to commit to long-term care with your surgical team, as this will help you use your surgery as the best possible weight loss tool to improve your health and well-being.

# The Biggest Mistakes People Make When Undergoing Weight loss Surgery

## **1. Thinking this is the “easy way out”.**

Don't believe people when they say this is the easy way out.

Yes, surgery makes losing weight easier but staying on track 100% is not easy. That requires time and effort to follow the expert advice of your surgical team, including your specialist dietitian.

## **2. Thinking that better health is a guaranteed outcome.**

Losing a large amount of weight definitely improves your medical health but a lot of care is needed to avoid nasty nutritional deficiencies.

Nasty nutritional deficiencies can result from not being able to eat enough healthy food and reduced nutrient absorption. This can lead to serious consequences such as iron deficiency and permanent nerve damage from chronically low levels of vitamin B12.

An experienced dietitian who specialises in weight loss surgery is the person who can teach you how to avoid and treat vitamin and mineral deficiencies. This is an essential aspect of after-care if you are committed to achieving better health and vitality.

## **3. Receiving poor advice leading to ongoing health issues.**

It is risky to expect advice from unqualified people will be good enough to help you avoid hair loss, nutritional deficiencies, and adverse gastrointestinal symptoms.

Weight loss surgery creates significant change in your body and in your ability and capacity to digest certain foods. The wrong advice can lead to serious discomfort and deficiencies. Only trust qualified experts to guide you through this important transition.



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### 4. Rushing through your food “texture stages”.

Many patients rush through the “texture stages” after their operation only to find they are dehydrated, weak and vomiting, or regurgitating or dumping on a daily basis.

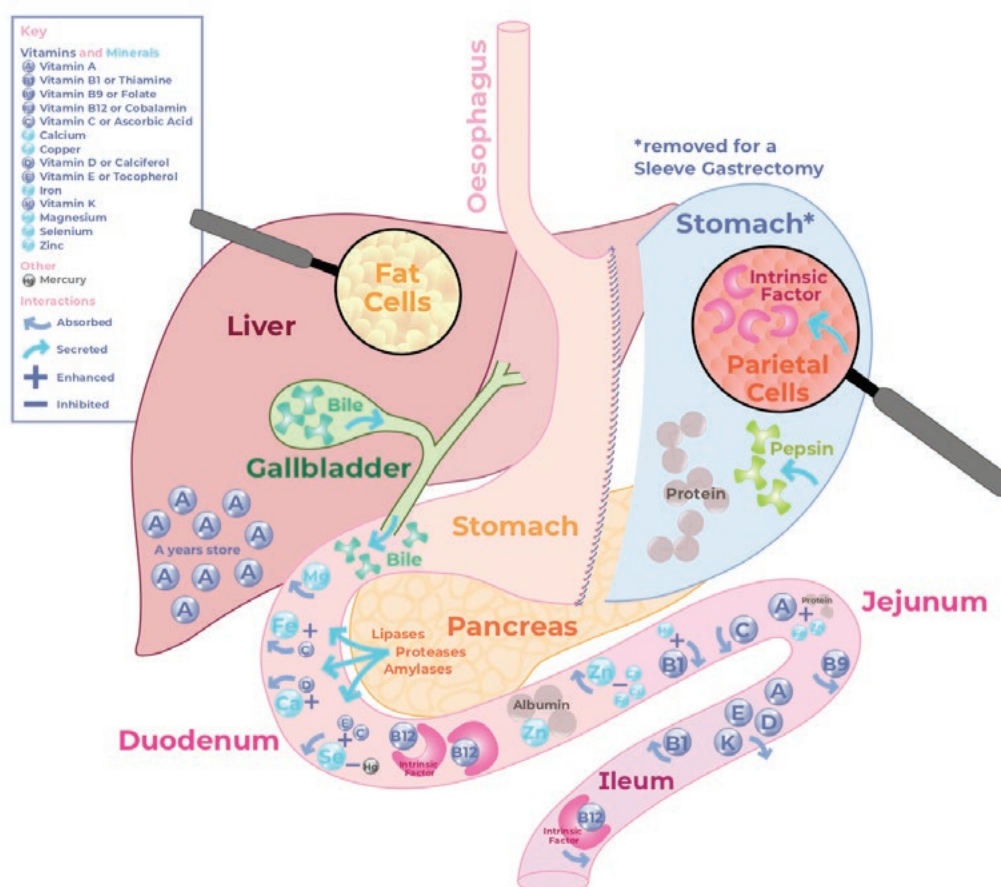
After surgery, caring for the new smaller stomach is crucial. Success is sabotaged by ignoring nutritional advice and neglecting important aspects of self-care.

You need a personalised eating plan that you follow closely to get the best results.

### 5. Thinking your body can absorb nutrients in the same way as before surgery.

This isn't true as the anatomical changes to the gastrointestinal tract alters nutrient absorption. You'll see from the picture below that the stomach plays a role in digestion. So, if some is removed (or bypassing) lower amounts of some nutrients are absorbed. This change is permanent so there is a LIFE LONG risk for nutrient deficiency.

It's very important not to leave your nutrition to chance. Expert advice is key to ensuring your body receives the nutrients it requires every step of the way.



# What Weight Loss Surgery Patients Really Need

1. A proven plan for their pre and post operative care.
2. The correct amount of vitamins and minerals to maintain good health after their surgery.
3. Professional advice to minimise hair loss, nutritional deficiencies, and adverse gastrointestinal symptoms.
4. An eating plan designed by professionals to guide them through the “texture stages” to minimise severe discomfort.
5. Expert advice to ensure their body receives the nutrients it requires every step of the way.

The **eatRIGHT 90 Day Transition** was designed specifically to help weight loss surgery patients enjoy the best possible results from their surgery and new life.

## About Enlighten Nutrition

At Enlighten Nutrition we believe the decision to have weight loss surgery is life changing. So, like any big decision it's important to have the information you need to make the right choice. Over the last 15 years, we've helped hundreds of people navigate their surgical journey and we hope that sharing what we've learnt in this guide will help you too.

Every year over 10,000 Australians choose to have weight loss surgery. Most choose surgery when normal life is becoming compromised because of their weight and other ways of losing weight simply aren't effective. For others, health concerns raised by your doctor or specialist are the catalyst for taking action.

Those who have undergone weight loss surgery describe it as life changing and many talk about the positive aspects and the ability to live a more normal life. From having more energy for family and friends, to reducing medications, sleeping better or buying clothes off the rack, the benefits are evident in everyday life.

Less talked about, though, are the things that need to happen ahead of the process, and while everyone's journey is different, there are steps that everyone needs to take.

This guide and our specialised eatRIGHT 90 Day Transition program have been carefully designed to help you through each important step that needs to be taken before and after surgery.

We hope you find the information helpful and we wish you all the best with your personal journey.

Warm regards,

Dr Cathy Harbury  
PhD N&D, BSc., Dip N&D, AdvAPD

Nicole West  
BHSc, N&D, APD

Co-founders of Enlighten Nutrition



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### Dr. Cathy Harbury AdvAPD

Doctorate of Philosophy (Nutrition & Dietetics), Bachelor of Science, Graduate Diploma of Dietetics

Member DA

My career as a Weight Loss Surgery dietitian literally began by accident! Fortunately for me it was someone else's accident. A dietitian at the John Hunter Hospital (Newcastle, NSW) where I worked broke her leg and I was asked to cover her weight loss surgery clinic. I found the role so rewarding that I covered her clinic for 10 years! I loved using my nutritional expertise to engage people in dietetic care. Being able to motivate people to take the next steps to improve their health is exciting. The success of surgical treatment for obesity relies on high quality nutritional care. I believe it's the crucial element that has the capacity to transform lives. Now I hope to share my knowledge and skills with more of those having weight loss surgery in Australia. I hope to teach more people how to avoid preventable nutritional deficiencies, how to plan, prepare and enjoy eating food that's both nutritious and delicious to live a fuller, longer, healthier life. Everybody who has weight loss surgery deserves this!



### Nicole West APD

Bachelor of Science (Nutrition & Dietetics)

Member DA

Since 2009 I've been providing dietetic care for those having weight loss surgery. I'm dedicated to ensuring that those who have surgery can access accurate nutritional information. Yet, I appreciate it is difficult for some people to attend dietetic appointments during office hours. As a working mum of 3 children, I realise that it's hard to juggle work, family and health commitments. Over the years I have seen many people lose contact with their surgical team as they put family and work before their health. Unfortunately, for some this has led to nutritional deficiencies and gradual weight regain. For those with busy lives it would be much more convenient to be able to access the right dietetic information online. That's why I've co-founded Enlighten Nutrition to develop an alternative way of accessing high quality nutrition information. Everybody deserves support and advice to live a fuller, longer, healthier life after weight loss surgery.





### What to expect when you visit your surgeon

As weight loss surgery is an elective procedure (ie: not an emergency operation) most surgeons will take time and care to evaluate how you will cope with an operation.

Attention is given to minimising the risks of surgical complications such as poor healing and infections, which may involve attending several different medical appointments depending on your current health. Each will have a specific purpose so make sure you have time in your schedule to get to these appointments.



Everybody's health is different and so each person's preparation will vary. Extra care is taken for those with sleep apnoea, heart problems, diabetes requiring insulin and those with a diagnosed mental health condition.

Investigations that are commonly recommended for everyone include:

- A range of blood tests to screen for common nutrient deficiencies (vitamin D and iron) and to establish baseline levels of "at risk" nutrients (vitamin B12).
- A gastroscopy to check the normality of your oesophagus and stomach for the presence of oesophagitis or a hiatus hernia.
- An anaesthetic assessment to review medications and identify any special needs for your theatre visit.
- A dietitian assessment. Many surgeons will provide a referral to an experienced dietitian with specialist surgical knowledge. Your ability to eat will change dramatically in the 90 days after surgery and your dietitian should provide specific advice to help you avoid unnecessary pain, discomfort and risk of complications. Expect your dietitian to be available to guide you through your whole weight loss journey.

Also consider your need for psychological support. During major life change many individuals benefit from psychological support. This can help you identify personal strengths and strategies to cope with challenging times.

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This may entail re-connecting with a counsellor or psychologist who has been helpful in the past. Or if you don't have an established mental health provider talk to your doctor, or surgical team for a recommendation and referral.

If your surgeon does not work with or recommend a dietitian, visit [www.anzmoss.com.au](http://www.anzmoss.com.au) then click on the "Nutrition" tab to "Find a Dietitian" with surgical experience.

Or....If you'd prefer the specialist support of Enlighten Nutrition we've designed two convenient and cost effective programs that will help you have a more energetic and comfortable transition to a healthier life.

Start with the **EatRight 90 Day Transition** and then move to the **LiveRight Daily Health Program**

**LEARN MORE**

You may be eligible for a rebate on your subscription depending on your level of private health cover or if you are utilising super, you may wish to consider this subscription in your budget.

### How will I pay for my operation?

Did you know that the average person is unable to afford the cost of weight loss surgery without private health insurance?

This is because few Australian hospitals (Government funded) offer weight loss surgery, with most procedures of this type confined to private hospitals (user pays). This means that patients have to pay for care, with the most cost effective way of having a weight loss surgery requiring the right health care insurance for at least 12 months (usually top cover).



It is ESSENTIAL that this insurance is for the right type of operation, so it's important to contact your health insurance company and ask for written confirmation that you are covered for the specific item numbers that stand for the different types of weight loss surgery operations. (See section below – Medicare Benefits Schedule item numbers).

In addition, there are other expenses to budget for too, including the surgeon's upfront fee and the cost for other medical appointments (such as the hospital cost, anaesthetist, assistant surgeon, discharge medications, pathology costs, dietitian, psychologist, exercise physiologist).

Surgeons charge different amounts and offer different services. Some for example, provide a period of aftercare with no out-of-pocket expenses because this was already included in your upfront payment for the cost of the operation. Ask your surgeon's receptionist for these details including a written quote to help you budget and manage your costs.

To make the operation more accessible, some people apply to access their superannuation funds, which requires paperwork and patience and can take longer than expected. Ask your surgeon's receptionist about this at your first appointment and apply as soon as possible if you are taking this path.

If you decide to self-fund your operation, instead of using a private health insurer, unexpected costs may occur. This can happen if your hospital stay is longer than anticipated due to post-operative complications (such as an infection, clot or leak).

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There are some additional costs to allow for too:

- time off work to recover
- time to attend all your appointments in the first few months

Plus ongoing expenses and resources to support the transition to a healthier life:

- monthly, lifelong cost of multivitamins
- protein supplements
- smaller bowls, plates and freezer containers
- kitchen equipment (eg: a blender)
- new clothes
- costs to participate in regular activity

We would also recommend:

- a subscription to our **EatRight 90 day transition**

### Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Item Numbers

These are the Medicare Benefits Schedule items numbers for the different types of operations:

Sleeve gastrectomy (31575), gastric bypass (31572), adjustable gastric band (31569), revision (31584), adjustable gastric band removal (31585), gastroplasty (31578), biliopancreatic diversion (31581).

Some other procedures that may accompany weight loss surgery include:

Gastroscopy (30473), hiatus hernia repair (31468, 30756, 31466), cholecystectomy (30445), gastric band adjustment (31587).

The actual numbers you need depends on what type of operation you have and any accompanying procedures undertaken by your surgeon. To avoid waiting longer to have your operation, due to delays in health insurance cover, it is ESSENTIAL that you check that you are covered for the correct MBS item numbers.

### What should I do to get ready for the operation?

Once you have decided to have surgery you will probably feel a mixture of emotions. Many people describe feeling excited, worried and even a little impatient for surgery day to arrive, but it's important to take this time to prepare for a major life change. Here are a few good ideas to help in your preparation:

#### Do your best to control your weight

Try hard to keep your weight under control and avoid gaining weight in the weeks and months before surgery.

Weight gain makes your liver larger and heavier, which can become an impediment during the operation. This not only makes the operation harder for your surgeon, but it's also riskier for you. On occasion, a large liver stops an operation proceeding causing major disappointment.



Be reassured that favourite foods will still be available after surgery, although you'll be eating small portions.

Of course, if you find yourself struggling, seek the support of your local dietitian and use consultation with them to help keep you accountable and on track. Also consider asking your regular doctor about the short-term use of medication to help control hunger and cravings prior to surgery. Remember a lighter you makes for a safer operation.

Take time to think about your eating habits, specifically keeping track of:

- How often you are eating
- How much you are eating
- How fast you are eating
- Are you drinking enough water for good hydration.



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### Do your best to improve your health

**For smokers** this means planning to quit before surgery, with a quit date six weeks before your operation. Remember quitting any time before surgery is better than not quitting at all. Surgeons will not operate on active smokers. This is because smoking slows healing, increases risk of infections and makes blood sticky. Sticky blood is more likely to clot, and this can be a life-threatening event.

**For caffeine addicts** this means slowly decreasing (over weeks and months) how much caffeine you have each day. This will help you avoid having a caffeine withdrawal during your hospital stay.

**For those with hypertension and using medications** this means monitoring your blood pressure weekly, or more often if requested by your doctor. This will help you and your doctor know when it's time to reduce (or cut out) your medication.

**For those with diabetes** this means monitoring your blood glucose levels regularly and fine-tuning the factors that will give you good control. Good control helps with wound healing and lowers the risk of infection.

**For those with a history of gout** this means taking your preventative medication daily. Weight loss can trigger gout attacks, so it's important to start taking your preventative medication before you start losing weight. Continue taking it throughout your weight loss journey, or until a doctor advises you otherwise. Your pharmacist can help you decide when to start your medication so it will be working when you need it to.

**For those with arthritis** and who rely on non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs this means discussing alternative options for pain relief with your surgeon or doctor. These types of drugs need to be avoided for at least three months after surgery, possibly forever (if you have a gastric bypass), to protect the stomach lining.

**For those wanting to get a head start on good eating habits;** start eating regularly (every 3-4 hours) and choose to eat mostly healthy foods, chewing your food well and eating meals slowly (~20 minutes). Avoid drinking at the same time as eating and drink mostly water. These are the eating habits that are a must during your EatRight 90 day transition.



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### Review your diary

Take time to organise your diary. Think about choosing a surgery date that works best for you and your family and review your work commitments so that you have enough time to recover fully from your operation. You will need time (up to 2 weeks) at home to rest, so postpone any unnecessary trips and travel until you have recovered.



### Organise your kitchen for new eating habits

The kitchen is an essential place to prepare for your EatRight 90 day transition.

Start by taking stock of what's in your freezer, leaving space so that during your EatRight 90 day transition you'll have room to freeze some portion controlled leftovers. Hold off freezing meals until you've learnt about your personal protein needs (a protein calculator is included in the EatRight 90 day transition).

Next, sort through your plastic containers to check you've got a supply of small ones (~ max size 1.5 cups).



Find yourself a few favourite water bottles and get in the habit of carrying one with you everywhere, as well as keeping a spare bottle in places that you visit regularly (at work, in your car etc).

Make sure you also have other handy pieces of equipment such as a stab mixer (eg nutribullet) and slow cooker on hand for future meal preparation.

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### Decide who to tell (and who not to tell)

This is a major life change. Positive support is important and helps you cope with the practical aspects needed to change your eating habits and the emotional experience of discovering the new you.

For many this means talking about your decision with trusted family and friends.

Others prefer to keep this information private and rely on the support of their healthcare team.

Whatever your decision, know that people (including random strangers) will notice changes in how you look and behave and it can be helpful to prepare for this.



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### Shannon's Story

Everybody's surgical experience is different. Yet it's still valuable to listen to the stories of others. It can help you understand what to expect and to set realistic goals for yourself.



#### Shannon's weight loss story: the first 10 years!

##### **Shannon decides she'd like to improve her quality of life, and prompts a discussion with her doctor...**

Before I decided to have a gastric band, my weight affected my life significantly. It was affecting me daily in everything I did and thought about. My weight was a problem for me physically but also mentally. Going out in public became a chore and a nightmare. I would have to consciously think things like; will I fit in the chair if I went out for lunch. I stopped attempting to go to movies or concerts or fly anywhere anymore as I had been confronted with these issues previously.

##### **In 2008, Shannon decides to have an adjustable gastric band...**

At the time of my gastric band surgery, it was a new procedure out that promised results. It was mentioned it was less invasive, cheaper and going to be a revelation in weight loss surgery.

##### **Back in 2008 she decides to keep her decision to have a gastric band private...**

The only people that did know were my immediate family members. I needed their help and support through the surgery and recovery as I had two small children. I did not tell anyone except my immediate family, no friends or work colleagues knew. I felt I would be judged and criticised for my decision as I had heard a lot that weight loss surgery is the "easy way out". I didn't want to feel like a failure if the surgery didn't work. But in the end, I think I used the secrecy of my surgery as something I could hide behind and not be countable for it.

##### **Shannon learns that having weight loss surgery is not the "easy way out"....**

The first year was extremely hard. I struggled with what food I could eat and how much I kept down. I would get a "stuck" feeling in my chest/throat and would immediately need to bring it back up. Some days were better than others, but overall, it was uncomfortable, annoying, and

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eating out became impossible. In the first year I lost just over 20 kilograms but soon stopped into my second year. I lived with the band for over 10 years. I made the decision to go and have further weight loss surgery as I had gained it all, plus more weight back on after my band.

**Did you know that it's normal for weight loss to stop in the second year after surgery? Regaining some weight is common too. Luckily losing 20 kg (like Shannon) can markedly improve health. However, if maintaining your health is being challenged by weight regain talk to your doctor and / or surgeon.**

**In 2018, Shannon consults with her surgeon after regaining all her lost weight...**

After consulting with my surgeon, it was made clear to me the gastric sleeve would best suit me. Which meant I had my band removed and waited three months for repair of my stomach.

I have told everyone and anyone about my sleeve surgery. It seems to be of a less "Taboo" subject now. I seem to be prouder of myself knowing from experience that this procedure is ONLY a helping hand to weight loss. I still need to do the hard work; I still need to look after myself and eat right. There hasn't been anyone I have kept my sleeve a secret from. Obviously, there will be acquaintances that might notice my weight loss that I haven't told. But if my weight loss was mentioned I would happily tell them about the sleeve.

My eating habits have not changed too much as I have always been a fairly healthy eater, my problem was the quantity. I did stop drinking soft drink. Luckily, I have had no issue with certain types of food and am enjoying eating most things I did before surgery, just smaller portions.

The role of a dietician when going through weight loss surgery or even weight loss is extremely important. You will always have questions, doubts and negative periods in your weight loss journey that need to be answered by someone that is nonjudgmental and experienced in their suggestions. There are many social media groups out there and everyone trying to offer each other their own personal advice, but a dietician is a professional that knows what's best for me/you.

**Thanks, Shannon, for sharing your story and we look forward to an update!**



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# How To Enjoy the Best Results from Weight Loss Surgery

The EatRight 90 Day Transition program has been designed specifically to help weight loss patients enjoy the very best results.

This guided program takes you from pre to post surgery with proven eating plans that are delicious (and nutritious) for every step of your journey, minimising discomfort and maximising your nutrition for a healthy, more energetic transition.

### **15 to 30 days before surgery (usually\*)**

A Very Low Energy Diet

### **Days 1 – 14 after surgery**

Drinking to recover & nourish

### **Days 15 – 30 after surgery**

Mixing nourishing moist & mushy foods

### **Days 30 – 60 after surgery**

Getting back some lumps & crunch

### **Days 60 – 90 after surgery**

Re-invent your eating habits for a healthier you

**Learn more about the EatRight 90 Day Transition and  
begin your journey to better health today.**



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### Words of advice from those who've had surgery...

Amanda Patterson

*“My friend doesn't have a dietitian. I think that's a major downfall. She's missing out on the education and hasn't got the support. The support does change things. It gets you thinking more and stops you going off track.”*

Nicole's patient (whose surgery remains a secret)

*“Having this surgery is not like other weight loss experiences. With my dietitian (Nicole West) I am learning to ensure maximum nutritional value into my smaller stomach.*

Claudia Tolhurst

*“If you're going to go through this journey, choose a dietitian wisely as that is the person who will take you through your journey – like the surgery, your dietitian is a vital tool in the process. The things I have learned from my dietitian (Cathy Harbury) have been amazing.*

Another patient whose surgery is a secret

*“I don't think anyone should have surgery without someone like Nicole. I can't even imagine why you would want to either. Being guided by Nicole has been absolutely fabulous, and without doubt, she is the reason for my success.*

Kathryn Coleman

*“Cathy Harbury has been a godsend to me and many others. Dietitian support is so valuable and I don't believe you will have success without it.*