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Document Title:

**Inserting a Gastric Balloon**

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## What is a gastric balloon?

A gastric balloon is an inflatable silicone balloon that is inserted in your stomach. It works by making you feel full sooner so that you eat less (see figure 1). Your doctor will inflate the balloon with air or salt water (saline).

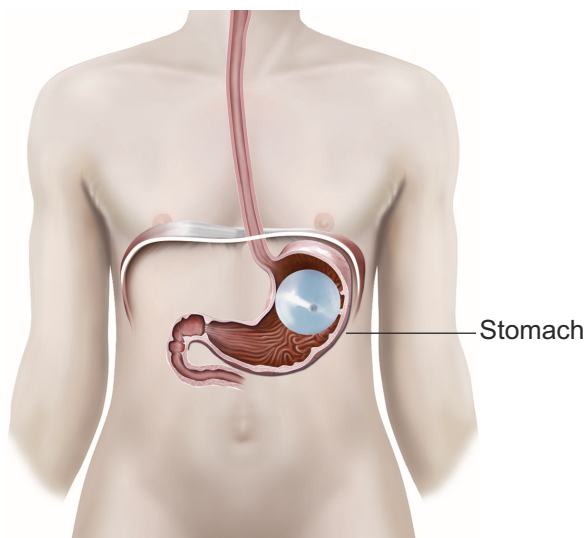


Figure 1

A gastric balloon in the stomach

Your doctor will assess you and tell you if a gastric balloon is suitable for you. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision. If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your doctor or the healthcare team.

## Is a gastric balloon suitable for me?

Your BMI (body mass index) is a measurement used to find out if your weight is within a healthy range for your height.

A BMI score of over 30 means that you are obese. This puts your health at risk and you will benefit from a programme of healthy eating and exercise aimed at long-term weight loss.

If your BMI score is over 40 (morbid obesity), surgery may help you to achieve long-term weight loss. Surgery may also help if you have a BMI over 35 (severe obesity) and have other medical problems such as Type-2 diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnoea (your breathing stops for 10 seconds or longer during sleep), breathing problems or heart disease.

Your doctor will confirm your BMI score and carry out a detailed assessment before deciding if surgery is suitable for you. This may include asking you questions about your medical history. A gastric balloon can only stay in place for up to 9 months. You should lose some weight during this time. For this reason, a gastric balloon can be used to help you to lose weight to prepare for weight-loss surgery or for an operation that you have been refused until you lose enough weight to reduce the risk of serious complications. A gastric balloon will only lead to long-term weight loss if you allow it to help you to change your appetite and improve your eating habits. Your doctor will discuss with you the changes you need to make to your lifestyle to achieve long-term weight loss. They will need to be satisfied that you are motivated to make the changes, including keeping to a new eating plan and exercising regularly.

## What are the benefits of a gastric balloon?

You should get improved eating habits to help you to achieve long-term weight loss but this depends on your ability to keep to your new lifestyle.

If you need weight-loss surgery or another operation, having a gastric balloon should help prepare you.

Long-term weight loss should improve most obesity-related health problems you may have.

## Are there any alternatives to a gastric balloon?

The simple approach to losing weight involves eating less, improving your diet and doing more exercise. Sometimes medication given by your GP can help.

There are surgical alternatives to a gastric balloon.

- Gastric banding – Inserting an adjustable silicone band around the upper part of your stomach.
- Shortening your digestive tract – Cutting away some of your bowel to limit how many calories and nutrients your body can absorb.
- Sleeve gastrectomy – Reducing the size of your stomach to a short tube shape.
- Gastric bypass (also called Roux-en-Y) – Stapling your stomach to create a smaller stomach 'pouch' and then bypassing the rest of your stomach and part of your bowel.

A gastric balloon has fewer complications and there is a lower risk of developing serious complications. Recovery is usually faster as the procedure does not involve cutting your stomach or other parts of your digestive system.

Although you should achieve some initial weight loss, the weight loss is not as much and is slower compared to the surgical options.

### **What will happen if I decide not to have a gastric balloon?**

The healthcare team will continue to support your efforts to eat less, improve your diet and do more exercise. Your surgeon may recommend that you go to your GP.

If your efforts are not successful, you will continue to be at a higher risk of developing serious medical problems.

### **Is silicone safe?**

Silicon (without the 'e') is one of the most common natural elements. It becomes silicone when it combines with oxygen, hydrogen and carbon. Silicone can be made into many forms and has brought major benefits to industries, such as food production and personal-care products.

Silicone is useful for healthcare products because it does not dissolve in water or react easily to changes in temperature or to substances in your body.

Silicone is used to make heart-valve replacements, facial implants and tubes used to give people medication.

Many studies have been carried out to find if silicone is safe. There is no evidence to suggest that people who have gastric balloons have a higher risk of developing diseases such as cancer and arthritis.

### **What does the procedure involve?**

#### **• Before the procedure**

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the procedure you came in for. You can help by confirming to your doctor and the healthcare team your name and the procedure you are having.

Do not eat or drink in the 6 hours before the procedure. This is to make sure your stomach is empty so your doctor can have a clear view of your stomach. It will also make the procedure more comfortable.

If you have diabetes, let the healthcare team know as soon as possible. You will need special advice depending on the treatment you receive for your diabetes.

#### **• In the endoscopy room**

Inserting a gastric balloon usually takes 20 minutes to an hour.

If appropriate, your doctor may offer you a sedative to help you to relax. If you decide to have a sedative, they will give it to you through a small needle in your arm or the back of your hand.

Once you have removed any false teeth or plates, they will usually spray your throat with some local anaesthetic and ask you to swallow it. This can taste unpleasant.

Your doctor will ask you to lie on your left side and will place a plastic mouthpiece in your mouth.

The healthcare team will monitor your oxygen levels and heart rate using a finger or toe clip. If you need oxygen, they will give it to you through a mask or small tube in your nostrils.

Your doctor will place a flexible telescope (endoscope) into the back of your throat. They may ask you to swallow when the endoscope is in your throat. This will help the endoscope to pass easily into your oesophagus (gullet) and down into your stomach.

Your doctor will be able to look for problems such as inflammation or ulcers. If they cannot see any problems, they will use the endoscope to pass the deflated balloon into your stomach. The balloon is attached to a soft tube and your doctor will use the tube to inflate the balloon with 650 to 750 millilitres of air or 400 to 700 millilitres of saline. The balloon is much larger than the valve out of your stomach so the balloon should stay in place.

Your doctor will remove the endoscope and soft tube leaving the balloon in your stomach.

The procedure is not painful but your stomach may feel bloated because air is blown into your stomach to improve the view.

#### **What should I do about my medication?**

Let your doctor know about all the medication you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medication as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medication you can buy over the counter.

For a few weeks you may need to take liquid forms of your medication or crush your tablets. Follow your doctor's advice about how to take your medication.

### **What can I do to help make the procedure a success?**

If you smoke, stopping smoking several weeks or more before the procedure may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Your doctor will give you a strict eating plan and it is essential that you follow this plan to achieve weight loss.

Exercise should help prepare you for the procedure and help you to recover. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice. After the procedure, keeping to an exercise programme is essential to help you to achieve long-term weight loss. Follow your doctor's advice.

### **What complications can happen?**

The healthcare team will try to make the procedure as safe as possible but complications can happen. Some of these can be serious and can even cause death (risk: 1 in 1,000). The possible complications of inserting a gastric balloon are listed below. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this procedure. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

#### **1 Endoscopy complications**

- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication. The healthcare team is trained to detect and treat any reactions that might happen. Let your doctor know if you have any allergies or if you have reacted to any medication or tests in the past.
- Breathing difficulties or heart irregularities, as a result of reacting to the sedative or inhaling secretions such as saliva. To help prevent this from happening, your oxygen levels will be monitored and a suction device will be used to clear any secretions from your mouth. Rarely, a heart attack (where part of the heart muscle dies) or stroke (loss of brain function resulting from an interruption of the blood supply to your brain) can happen if you have serious medical problems.

- Infection. It is possible to get an infection from the equipment used, or if bacteria enter your blood. The equipment is sterile so the risk is low but let your doctor know if you have a heart abnormality or a weak immune system. You may need treatment with antibiotics. Let your doctor know if you get a high temperature or feel unwell.
- Making a hole in your oesophagus or stomach (risk: 1 in 2,000). You will need to be admitted to hospital for further treatment which may include surgery.
- Damage to teeth or bridgework. Your doctor will place a plastic mouthpiece in your mouth to help protect your teeth. Let your doctor know if you have any loose teeth.
- Bleeding from minor damage caused by the endoscope. This usually stops on its own.
- Incomplete procedure caused by a technical difficulty, food or blockage in your upper digestive system, complications during the procedure, or discomfort.

#### **2 Gastric balloon complications**

- Feeling or being sick. Having the weight of a balloon in your stomach can make you feel sick. This can be severe enough for your doctor to need to remove the balloon (risk: 1 in 50). You will be given anti-sickness medication to reduce this risk.
  - Developing acid reflux, where acid from your stomach travels up into your oesophagus (risk: 34 in 100).
  - Constipation or diarrhoea (risk: 9 in 100). Your doctor may give you some medication.
  - Failure of the balloon if it develops a leak or faulty valve (risk: less than 5 in 100). The balloon will get smaller and will not work to change your appetite. Sometimes your doctor will fill the balloon with dyed-blue saline and you will notice that your urine and even your skin turn blue. Your doctor will usually need to remove and replace the balloon. Sometimes the balloon will pass through your system and you will notice it when you pass a motion.
  - Bowel obstruction, if the balloon deflates and moves down into your small bowel (risk: less than 1 in 100). If you vomit, get pain or bloating in your abdomen, or become completely constipated, let your doctor know. You will usually need an operation to remove the balloon.
- You should discuss these possible complications with your doctor if there is anything you do not understand.



## How soon will I recover?

### • In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward.

You may be given anti-sickness medication. It is important to follow the eating and drinking instructions that your doctor gives you. This will help to give your stomach time to settle. You need to remember to protect the balloon by not drinking too much and taking only small sips at a time.

You should be able to go home the same day or the day after. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay a little longer.

If you do go home the same day, a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. Be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

### • Returning to normal activities

Do not drive, operate machinery or do any potentially dangerous activities (this includes cooking) for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination.

If you had a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

You may be able to take only liquids for a few weeks, progressing to soft food and then, after one to two weeks, to solid food. Follow the advice of your doctor or dietician.

You should be able to return to work after one to two days, depending on how soon your stomach settles and your type of work.

Your doctor may tell you not to do any manual work for a while. Do not lift anything heavy for a few weeks.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. You should be able to start exercising again after a week. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check your insurance policy and with your doctor.

### • Removing the balloon

Your doctor will need to remove the balloon after 6 to 9 months. This involves another endoscopy.

### • The future

Aim to lose your excess weight at a weekly rate of around 0.5kg to 1kg (about 1lb to 2lbs).

Sometimes people who have a gastric balloon do not lose as much weight as they want to (risk: 1 in 10). This is usually caused by eating between meals, eating high-calorie dense food (such as mashed potato, sweets and chocolate) and drinking too many liquid calories (found in sugar-rich fruit juice, soft drinks, milkshakes and alcohol).

For women, it may be best to wait a year before trying to become pregnant. Although pregnancy is safer if you are not morbidly obese, you may be at a higher risk of developing complications related to the operation.

The success of the procedure depends on your ability to keep to your new lifestyle. On average, people who have a gastric balloon lose over one third of their excess body weight (the difference between their weight before the operation and their healthy weight).

### Summary

Inserting a gastric balloon is usually a safe and effective way of helping you achieve long-term weight loss if a simple approach involving eating less, improving your diet and doing more exercise does not work. However, complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about the procedure. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

**Keep this information leaflet. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.**

### Acknowledgements

Author: Mr Ian Beckingham DM FRCS  
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