

Mother and Daughter Tip the Scales Against Disease with UC San Diego Medical Center

Team Approach to Weight Loss Conquers Family History of Obesity and Diabetes

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Two months ago, Phoenix residents Marlene Zytcer, 57, and her daughter Aimee, 31, traveled to the University of California, San Diego Medical Center for a minimally invasive surgery to lose weight. Called gastric banding, the simple procedure has life-saving potential by helping the mother-daughter team successfully fight their genetic tendency toward diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

"My mother is diabetic and going blind. If I did not go to UC San Diego Medical Center, this would be my future too," said Marlene, a retired kindergarten teacher who was diagnosed with diabetes at the age of 40. "Aimee was headed in the same direction. By working side-by-side to lose weight, we are turning the tide against a family history of disease. We have strength in numbers, even if the number is two."

"The surgery has been a godsend," she added. "I no longer have to take diabetes or cholesterol medication, and my blood pressure is down. My stamina is back and I feel great."

Traveling from Arizona, Marlene and her daughter flew to UCSD Medical Center to see Santiago Horgan, M.D., director of the Center for the Treatment of Obesity. After it was determined they were ideal candidates for gastric banding, Marlene and Aimee set a date for treatment.

During the 40-minute outpatient procedure, Horgan places an adjustable band around the upper stomach to form a small gastric pouch. The band creates an hourglass shaped stomach, limiting food intake. If necessary, the belt-like band can be adjusted or removed any time.

Just six weeks after the procedure, Marlene and Aimee have lost almost 70 combined pounds. Marlene started at 236 and is down to 199. Aimee started at 195 and is down to 165. Their goal weights are 150 and 130 pounds, respectively.

Before the gastric banding, Marlene had been taking multiple diabetes and cholesterol medications. With her reduction in weight, she is now able to eliminate more than four prescriptions and treat her diabetes and cholesterol with diet and exercise.

Aimee Zytcer, a pharmacist, said the procedure has helped reduce joint pain. "I often stand for 12 hours per day. The drop in weight has reduced discomfort in my knees and feet. I feel better everyday."

Key to the joint weight loss has been daily communication between the mother and daughter who live ten minutes apart from each other.

"We are always talking, emailing, and sharing online recipes. Together, we solve ways to cook light and eat lots of protein," said Marlene. It's nice to have someone nearby who knows exactly what you're going through. And to help keep an eye on what you're eating."

Even though the Zytcers live in Arizona, they still receive personalized care from the UCSD Center for the Treatment of Obesity.

"We regularly call and email the Center. If I send an email on a Sunday night, there is a response waiting for me Monday morning. I often receive a personal phone call if the answer is more complex," said Marlene.

In addition to regular phone and email contact, The UCSD Center for the Treatment of Obesity offers a monthly support group to those trying to lose weight. While Marlene and Aimee can not attend the meetings, the Center sends them summaries of the meetings along with any handouts.

Two months after the procedure, Marlene and Aimee visited Dr. Horgan for an adjustment to their gastric band. After numbing the skin, a thin needle is inserted into the band to inject a saline solution to continue to limit the amount of food that can be ingested.

"Whether it takes one year or ten years, we will meet our goal weights," said Aimee. "It's just a matter of time, persistence, and talking to each other. We can lose the weight together."

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