

PERMANENT RESOLUTION

SEVERAL WEIGHT LOSS CENTERS IN HAMPTON ROADS PROVIDE PROFESSIONAL HELP FOR A GROWING PROBLEM



Charles West made a special trip to Busch Gardens Tampa Bay in Florida to experience the mega roller coasters he had heard so much about. When he got there, however, he found himself watching from the sidelines—he couldn't fit into the rides.

It was this trip that made the 37-year-old Newport News resident turn to the Center for Metabolic Health in Newport News, a facility focused on helping patients with weight loss management. He had already been suffering from adult-onset diabetes and sleep apnea. West's allergist said losing weight would help the sleep apnea and recommended the CMH to him.

West says he has never tried any other diets like Weight Watchers or the Atkins diet, but he did research all those programs and says they didn't appeal to him. Now, West couldn't be more satisfied—he's been participating in group exercise at CMH, as well as working with a personal trainer. "I've been losing weight since basically day one; the first weekend I lost 11 pounds," he says.

If you're like most other Americans, losing those extra holiday pounds is at the top of your list of resolutions for the New Year—and statistically speaking, if you keep your resolution for more than a week, consider yourself unique.

But for some, like Charles West, losing weight isn't a goal that can be relegated to the post-holiday time of renewal, and going back to old habits can cause more harm than just the regular frustration of a broken resolution. In 2002, the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion determined that almost 24 percent of Virginians 18 and up are obese, a statistic that's steadily increased from 9.9 percent in 1990. If you are overweight, you are far more likely to suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure and hypertension—and these are just the common medical conditions that can result from excessive poundage.

In Hampton Roads, there are plenty of options for those who count weight loss as much more serious than the perennial New Year's resolution. Bariatrics is the medical field focusing on the treatment of obesity through a combination of different programs. For those determined to reach and maintain a healthy weight through diet, exercise or even surgery, there are professionals in the area with years of experience to assist in what may seem like a daunting task.

NUTRITION ASSISTANCE

At the Chase Wellness & Research Center in Virginia Beach, multiple programs can help with dieting, nutrition and weight management. Dr. Lisa Harris, who has treated nearly 8,000 people in Hampton Roads, started the center in 1994. She has struggled with her own weight since childhood and became more interested in the study of weight management when she attended medical school in New York. She came to Virginia equipped with the experience of working under the guidance of bariatric physicians there, where the field is quite common.

Chase does not administer weight loss surgery, although patients often come in order to prepare for surgery. A 32-year-old female patient there, who has been preparing for a December weight loss surgery at Norfolk General, participated in a six-month, calorie-control diet at Chase. What was most successful for her, she says, was the center's Opti-Fast program. She had already tried programs like Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig, but with the Opti-Fast, she says, "I've lost 30 pounds in the last month, and that's been the most successful thing so far."

The Opti-Fast program consists of a full meal replacement diet that decreases calories but doesn't decrease important nutrients. Chase also prescribes

medications, behavior modification classes, individualized programs and consultations with on-staff dietitians, and mesotherapy to aid in weight loss. Mesotherapy is an alternative to liposuction used for body contouring and reduction of body fat and cellulite through subcutaneous injections. The program focuses on treating patients holistically, not just calorie counting. Although, naturally, Dr. Harris says, "We talk about food all the time, because obviously there's something wrong with their relationship with food."

There are more than 1,000 patients presently being treated at Chase. It is not uncommon for patients to become long-term participants of the program. "We have some people who've been coming in every

month for three or four years just to maintain the weight," says Dr. Harris.

The cost of services at the center, Dr. Harris says, "Depends on how much weight they have to lose. We try to stress to people that losing weight is very important, but the primary goal is always to keep it off, and I try to remove any barriers like, 'Oh I'm not gonna come in anymore; I'm not gonna continue treatment.' So once they reach their goal weight, I don't charge them any more fees to encourage them to come in."

Dr. Thomas Clark operates another option for people wanting the help of professionals to assist in weight loss—the Center for Metabolic Health in Newport News, where Charles West is a patient. This center guides patients through weight loss management even if they are not anticipating surgery. Health history and medical exams, body composition analysis, individualized counseling and personal training are some of the different options available for adolescents, adults and families.

Of course, the medical benefits of weight loss centers aren't just limited to trimming the excess pounds. Joan Flannery, a 56-year-old woman from Poquoson, has been taking medication for high blood pressure for two years; her mother and two brothers also take medication. She joined the CMH in July, and after only a

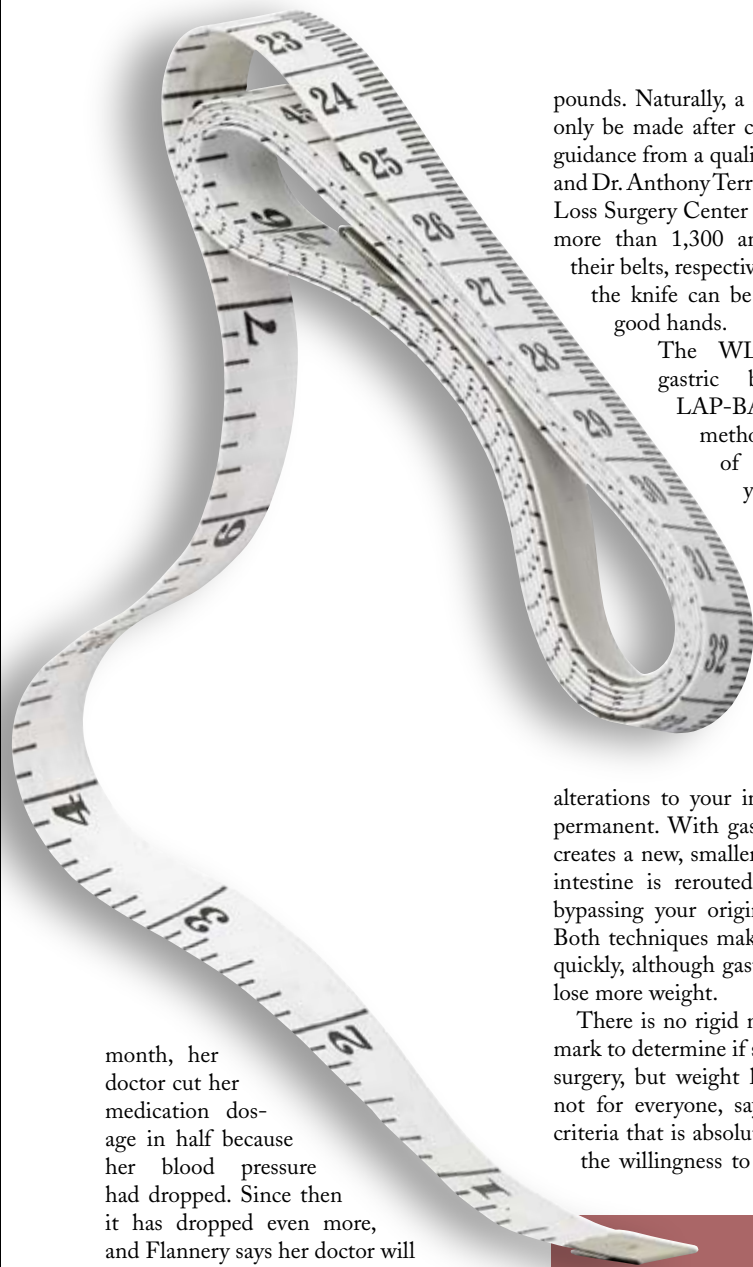


WEIGHT LOSS CENTERS

The Chase Wellness & Research Center
 1115 Independence Blvd., Suite 118
 Virginia Beach
 757-460-4300

Center for Metabolic Health
 733 Thimble Shoals Blvd.
 Newport News
 757-873-1880

Weight Loss Surgery Center of Hampton Roads, P.C.
 645 J. Clyde Morris Blvd.
 Newport News
 757-591-9571



month, her doctor cut her medication dosage in half because her blood pressure had dropped. Since then it has dropped even more, and Flannery says her doctor will probably take her off the medication completely at her next visit.

Flannery says she had tried it all before; she would lose a lot of weight and then gain it right back. She called the CMH because she realized something was missing in all her previous techniques. "I had realized in my weight loss journey, it isn't just about eating less. I needed the entire package. I needed a program; I need nutritional advice, because what I was doing was not working," she says.

IS SURGERY AN OPTION?

When traditional weight loss methods and expert advice aren't enough, especially if health is a primary concern, many people resort to weight loss surgery to shed the

pounds. Naturally, a decision like this should only be made after careful consideration and guidance from a qualified physician. Dr. Clark and Dr. Anthony Terracina manage the Weight Loss Surgery Center in Newport News. With more than 1,300 and 600 surgeries under their belts, respectively, patients going under the knife can be assured they will be in good hands.

The WLSC administers both gastric bypass surgeries and LAP-BAND surgeries. Both methods decrease the amount of food that will fit into your stomach by creating new, smaller pouches into which food fills. The LAP-BAND method is the least invasive method, entailing the placement of a band around a portion of your stomach—it is removable, and its alterations to your internal anatomy are not permanent. With gastric bypass, the surgeon creates a new, smaller stomach, and the small intestine is rerouted to that new stomach, bypassing your original stomach completely. Both techniques make patients feel full more quickly, although gastric bypass allows you to lose more weight.

There is no rigid minimum weight benchmark to determine if someone should undergo surgery, but weight loss surgery is definitely not for everyone, says Dr. Clark. The only criteria that is absolutely necessary, he says, is the willingness to undergo that procedure

and understanding that it is not a quick "magical" fix that lets you go back to old eating and exercising habits. Surgery is also not recommended for anyone under 18.

Julie Bray, a 50-year-old woman from Topping, Va., opted for the LAP-BAND method because it is the less intrusive method and because she says, "I wanted to be part of the solution," since this method causes less weight loss than gastric bypass and requires patients to work that much harder through dieting and exercise. Bray has lost 110 pounds, 20 of which she lost on her own before the surgery.

Bray still goes in for checkups every six weeks and attends weekly classes for those who have had LAP-BAND procedures whenever she can. She says she has made a 180-degree change in her life and says, "I am very, very conscientious about what I eat."

Dr. Clark says he became involved in bariatrics because there is nothing that changes someone's life more than losing weight and keeping it off when excessive weight has kept someone at home and affecting health for so long. "There is nothing more satisfying than helping people live their dreams," he says.

The Bon Secours Health System also operates a Surgical Weight Loss Center in Suffolk. Its range of services includes psychological, nutritional and physical evaluations. And because unhealthy eating habits can start early, the Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters in Norfolk has a Weight Management Program that's been operating since 2001.

"Anyone's who's overweight can benefit from losing some weight," says Dr. Harris. "Try to institute physical activity from the beginning. That's the key to keeping the weight down." **HR**

ARE YOU OVERWEIGHT?

HERE'S A QUICK WAY TO FIGURE OUT IF YOU'RE OUTSIDE THE SAFE ZONE

A good rule of thumb to self-determine if you are overweight, and one of the first measures used by physicians, is to calculate your Body Mass Index. Calculating BMI is simple—it's a ratio of your height to your weight. A quick internet search for "BMI Calculator" will reveal several websites, like www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/, that allow you to plug in your information and get BMI results quickly calculated for you.

A BMI of 25 indicates that someone is overweight; indexes of more than 30 indicate obesity; and an index of 40 or higher indicates that someone may qualify for weight loss surgery.