

# 12 THINGS YOU MUST KNOW GASTRIC BAND



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**H**aving been endorsed by celebrities such as Fern Britton, Sharon Osbourne and Vanessa Feltz, gastric band surgery is not an unusual procedure these days. But there's still a lot of confusion over its effectiveness, safety and long-term care – especially when some people claim it's a waste of money. So here's the low-down on the so-called quick-fix slimming option.

## What's the difference between a gastric band and other gastric surgery?

Unlike a bypass, sleeve and other gastric surgery, which permanently reduce the size of a stomach, a band is a much simpler operation. Instead of cutting into the stomach to make it smaller, a silicone ring (the band) is placed around the top of the stomach to create a small pouch. This pouch holds about half a cup of food, whereas a normal stomach can hold around six cups. Therefore you eat less and your body starts to burn stored fat.

## Is treatment available on the NHS or is it a bit of a postcode lottery?

Treatment is available on the NHS, but different regions in the country have different criteria. Some regions require you to have a higher body mass index than others, but you generally need a BMI of 40 or over before being granted surgery – and some authorities have other requirements due to financial constraints. The waiting time in the NHS is longer than for private treatment.

## How much does it cost to go private?

In the UK the gastric band operation costs around £6,900, which includes a year of follow-up care.

## Will a band switch off hunger?

In a way, yes – as the top of the stomach sends 'I'm full' signals to the brain. So once the pouch is full, you feel you've had enough, even though you may only have eaten a few mouthfuls of food.

## Can a gastric band be a cure for diabetes?

It may not be for long-term diabetics who control their condition with a number of medications. But up to 60 per cent of patients with type 2 diabetes who have a gastric band will be cured and another 20 per cent will have much better control, provided they have had the condition for less than 10 years. Research is continuing into why some patients may redevelop the condition in the future.

## Is it permanent?

No, the band can be removed and the stomach will return to its normal size and volume unless there are complications. However, there will be some scarring where the band was placed.

## Will this treatment definitely make me thin?

It won't definitely make you thin, but it will mean you won't be able to eat the same amount of bulky food as before. For example, you'll feel full after only a few spoons of pasta rather than a normal-sized portion – and instead of being able to eat several pork pies in one go you'll only manage a small slice. If you follow instructions carefully, you are likely to lose more weight.

## Is it possible not to lose any weight with a gastric band?

Yes, as it's easy to 'cheat the band' by eating fattening foods such as ice cream, buttery mash and rich sauces that slip comfortably through. Liquids are also easily digestible, so sugary drinks and alcohol will be just as calorific with or without the band. This is why people who have had a gastric band fitted don't necessarily lose weight.



# HOW ABOUT BANDS

## What's the success rate for gastric bands?

Roughly 80 per cent of patients lose over half of their excess weight in the two years following the procedure.

Some can lose all of their surplus pounds, but most commonly they lose between 50-60 per cent of extra weight, and some patients may lose less than 10 per cent.

## Will the band keep working until it's removed?

As you start to lose weight, the gastric band has to be adjusted to make sure the stomach pouch stays small and continues to restrict the intake of food. The hollow gastric band is injected with saline solution via a small channel placed under the skin if the band is too loose, and saline is removed when the band is too tight. This procedure is called a 'fill' and has to be done at regular intervals to keep the band at the right tension and restrict the amount of food into the lower part of the stomach.

## Will it improve fertility?

Yes. Many patients who were unable to conceive before the treatment become pregnant. But it is advisable to postpone pregnancy for 18 months after surgery or the baby may suffer from nutritional deficiency and the mother may not lose weight.

## Are there any dangers getting cut-price surgery abroad?

Yes, there are many dangers, even when having surgery in Europe. Surgeons may not be trained to the same standard as their UK counterparts and sometimes the band has to be adjusted frequently in small steps. In addition, if there are complications these can be very expensive to treat. **R**

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