

# Losing Big Time—and Loving It

**Larenda Dravenstott's laparoscopic surgery for a gastric bypass enabled her to lose weight and regain her life**

**L**arenda Dravenstott had finally had enough. She couldn't climb on a stepstool at work to reach a file. When she sat too long, her feet would swell.

She wasn't able to give herself a pedicure, couldn't work in her garden, had trouble washing her feet in the shower, and had difficulty breathing. And, perhaps worst of all, she would feel her knees start to give when she tried to pick up one of her young grandsons and swing him around.

It wasn't a physical disability that was diminishing Dravenstott's quality of life. It was that she weighed more than 300 pounds. And it wasn't that she hadn't tried to lose weight. She had, many times over: liquid diets, diet pills, the cabbage soup diet, even one of the more realistic week-by-week weight-loss programs.

But each time, the weight came back "With a vengeance," said Dravenstott, 57. She was weary of the yo-yo. "I needed to make a decision," she said. "So I went to a seminar on weight-loss surgery at Saint Luke's, and it won me over, hands down."

### Heeding the warning signs

Saint Luke's Center for Surgical Weight Loss offers two types of bariatric surgery ("bariatric" referring to obesity). One is lap band surgery, which uses an adjustable band around the stomach to restrict the amount of food that enters. The other is gastric bypass surgery, which sets up a detour around parts of the digestive tract so that patients eat less and absorb fewer calories.

Dravenstott chose the latter, as it would allow her to lose more weight more rapidly.

As is true of nearly all bariatric surgeries that Saint Luke's performs, Dravenstott's was laparoscopic, which meant that only a few small incisions had to be made.

"A major advantage of the laparoscopic method is less pain and a faster recovery," said John Price, M.D., a member of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery who heads Saint Luke's weight loss center. "Larenda's surgery was more of a challenge because of prior surgery she'd had,

but she did well nevertheless."

Dravenstott describes the surgery as, simply, "amazing." "My downtime was very short," she said. "It was a very quick recovery period."

Soon after, she began to feel and see the difference. She's now down from a size 30 to a size 14. While she wants to drop to an even smaller size, her main goal is to be healthier.

"I never liked the word 'morbid,' as in 'morbid obesity,' but I realize now that I really was dying," Dravenstott said. "My body was giving me warning signs—my heart racing, my breathing labored—and I'm so glad I listened."

Dr. Price has seen many a patient reach such a conclusion. "Patients come to their decision to have bariatric surgery at their own pace," he said. "For Larenda, it was time."

### An appetite for life

Dravenstott credits the post-surgical program the center provides for her success as a happy loser.

"There's life after surgery with Saint Luke's," she said. "They cared about how I'd deal with issues after the surgery and the radical change it would make in my life."

For example, relearning how to eat—but, this time, properly. "Protein First" is what Dravenstott now practices. She'll often have an egg and lowfat yogurt for breakfast, chicken salad for lunch, and grilled chicken with green beans or lowfat cottage cheese for dinner. She avoids sweets and caffeine.

"Before, I lived to eat," Dravenstott said. "Now I eat to live."

And live she does, not only swinging her 3- and 5-year-old grandsons around, but hunkering right down on the floor to play with them. She's also doing something this year that she used to have to ask her daughters to do: She's going Christmas shopping.

"The surgery was a life-saving experience for me and life-changing as well," said Dravenstott, who admits she was somewhat hesitant about it initially. Now she's an evangelist.

"I'm willing to help anyone who has doubts," she said. "I tell them to *run* to Saint Luke's and get scheduled." ✦

## Food for Thought—and for Life

**S**aint Luke's bariatric surgery patients get lessons in how to eat the right way.

Larenda Dravenstott's adherence to the "Protein First" rule (see story) is a helpful dietary tip to keep in mind for maintaining weight.

"Protein keeps us feeling full longer," explained Thelma Blew, M.S., R.D., L.D., and a Bariatric Dietitian for Saint Luke's. "It also maintains our blood sugar longer."

Other healthier eating tips for patients after surgery:

- Avoid both carbonated and caffeinated beverages. "Carbonation expands the stomach," Blew said. "Plus, a lot of carbonated drinks have caffeine, which stimulates the appetite."
- Cut food into small bits, about the size of a pencil eraser, and chew each one 15 to 20 times.
- Drink 64 ounces of caffeine- and sugar-free liquid each day.
- Exercise at least a half hour each day.
- Don't smoke.

"What we're really helping patients develop is a healthier lifestyle for the rest of their lives," Blew said. ✦



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**—Larenda Dravenstott, a happy loser of 100 pounds and counting, after gastric bypass at Saint Luke's Center for Surgical Weight Loss**