



Too Young? Teen Gets Stomach Band After Lipo

Family Defends Decision to Let Teen Get Gastric Lap-Band Surgery

Aug. 15, 2007 —

A Texas family that attracted national attention □ and controversy □ for letting its overweight 12-year-old daughter undergo liposuction has gone one step further.

Brooke Bates, 13, has gotten a gastric lap band surgically placed around her stomach to shrink it and reduce the amount she can eat.

Brooke has lost 15 pounds since the lap-band procedure and hopes to lose 50 more. She told "Good Morning America" today she feels "wonderful."

Brooke said she has always struggled with her weight. At her heaviest, she weighed 220 pounds. By early 2006 she lost 40 pounds through liposuction and a tummy tuck. But, in less than a year, she regained 35 pounds.

After the liposuction and tummy tuck, which cost \$25,000, Brooke said she "went from the big, fat girl to the popular girl."

"Then I gained weight back and it was depressing," Brooke said. "But now that I had the lap band done, everything is just working out great."

Traveling to Mexico

Brooke's mother, Cindy Bates, said she was sad for Brooke when she began gaining weight after her first round of surgeries, but she said she didn't blame her daughter.

"It was the happiest year of her life and it was sad watching her, you know, struggle with trying to keep the weight off," Cindy said. "So that's the reason we did the lap band so she could control her hunger and how much food intake she was putting in her body every day."

Most doctors in the United States usually don't perform gastric lap-band surgery unless a patient is at least 18 years old, has a body mass index of 40 or higher or weighs at least twice his or her ideal weight.

So against the advice of their family doctor, the Bates traveled to Mexico to get the procedure done, without trying to find a local surgeon. The procedure cost \$7,900.

"It seemed to be very safe over there and the clinic Brooke had it done in was very clean and the doctor has lots of experience & so I was fairly confident," said Cindy.

Though Brooke's case may seem extreme, children and teens getting cosmetic surgery has increased drastically during the last decade, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

But doctors worry that getting weight loss surgeries so young can be detrimental in the long term and don't address underlying issues.

"I think it is important to make sure that diet and exercise and lifestyle issues are addressed. I think surgery is really not the answer in this age group," said Julius Few, a plastic surgeon at Northwestern Medical Center.

Not the Easy Way Out, Says Teen

While Brooke likened her overeating to an addiction, her mother said that she didn't believe the problem was psychological.

"I don't really relate it to an emotional issue," Cindy said. "I think it's more of a hereditary characteristic in our family."

Brooke also found it difficult to stick to a diet and workout regime, Cindy said, and she couldn't constantly monitor her habits.

Though Brooke mainly exercised at home after her liposuction, she has now joined a gym.

The teen also said that she doesn't see surgery as an "easy way" to lose weight.

"It's no walk in the park," Brooke said. "I don't think getting cut and going through surgery is the easy way out."

Brooke says she's determined to get to her goal weight.

"I want to get down to about 125 to 130 pounds, so I have a lot more weight to lose. But I lost 15 pounds in about three weeks and I know I can [lose] more."

Copyright © 2008 ABC News Internet Ventures