

THE 'HEALTHWISE' COLUMN

STOMACH BALLOON

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This is an intra-gastric balloon inserted into the stomach.

It is suitable for those who have tried to lose weight by other means and failed, but have a Body Mass Index (BMI) — an index of obesity — too low to have weight reduction surgery.

BMI is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in metres. A person with a BMI of between 23 and 27.4 is classed as overweight, putting him at moderate risk of major illnesses such as heart attack, stroke, diabetes and arthritis.

The BMI for obesity was also recently revised downwards from 30 and above to 27.5 and above.

If your BMI is 27, you can consider talking to doctors about stomach balloons. It is inserted with the help of a gastroscope via the mouth and gullet (food pipe) into the stomach.

The balloon is inflated to a suitable volume (450 to 600ml). The tube is then disconnected from the balloon and a valve seals the hole off.

The procedure is performed under sedation and patients will usually have to stay overnight.

The balloon, about the size of a grapefruit, occupies space within the stomach and makes the patient feel full after consuming only a small amount of food.

Said Dr Baladas HG, a consultant bariatric surgeon (surgery for obesity) at Raffles Hospital: 'It is 95 per cent



successful. My patients have lost from 7 to 15kg. The balloon has to be removed six months later as the acid in the stomach will eventually dissolve the material and cause it to leak."

Most of the side effects occur within the first three days.

"They then become less severe and are usually gone by one week. The (most common) side effects are nausea, vomiting and cramps, until the stomach gets accustomed to the balloon," said Dr Baladas.

Very occasionally, the balloon may deflate prematurely. Then, it will have to be removed early.

Removal of the balloon is also performed by gastroscopy, a day surgery procedure. You cannot have this procedure if you are under 18, pregnant, have a stomach ulcer or gastro-oesophageal reflux (where food comes back up the oesophagus).

It costs between \$4,600 and \$4,800 at the Raffles Hospital.