



NORTHWEST HOSPITAL  
& MEDICAL CENTER

# Med-Info

A Health Magazine Connecting Northwest Hospital & Medical Center with Our Community



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## Weight-Loss Surgery Brings Freedom from Limitations



For 27-year-old Katie Whitmore, life is about firsts: her first time in an airplane without worrying if the seat belt would fit. The first time she went on the swings with her first-grade students at recess. Her first shopping trip to a store that had regular sizes. The first time she got through an entire day without back pain.

A little over a year ago, Whitmore, who is 5' 4", weighed 305 pounds. Based on the ratio of her height to her weight – or her body mass index (BMI) – she was considered super morbidly obese. In the United States, more than 50 million people are obese and more than 400,000 deaths a year can be attributed to obesity. Obesity can also lead to serious health conditions including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, asthma, osteoarthritis and gout, reflux, back problems and many others.

Whitmore had struggled with her weight for a number of years and had been on multiple supervised diets without any sustained success. “I kept thinking I could try one more time and do it on my own,” she says. She suffered from back pain and sleep apnea and could not climb stairs or walk long distances without becoming short of breath.

“Whenever I planned to do anything with anyone, I had to think about my weight. Could I do it? Could I keep up? Even something as simple as walking with a friend, I had to think about whether I could make it.”

Towards the end of 2005, Whitmore’s sister and brother-in-law told her they were having a baby. “It made me realize that my life had been on hold. I was waiting until I lost weight to do all of these things and I was tired of fighting the battle,” she says. “I wanted the energy, focus and freedom to do whatever I wanted with all the kids in my life that I love so dearly – my students, cousins and new little niece – as well as the children and family I hope to someday have.”

After talking about her feelings with a close friend, Whitmore decided to take another look at weight-loss, or bariatric, surgery. She had researched bariatric surgery in the past but had never gone further. With the encouragement of her friend, who agreed to go with her, Whitmore registered for an informational seminar led by Dr. Joseph Chebli of Northwest Hospital’s Bariatric Surgery Program.

“We think it’s critical to educate patients by presenting data, medical evidence and the pros and cons of every procedure available, not just the ones we do here at the hospital,” says Chebli. “Then we help patients work through who they are, what their expectations and goals are and what option might be right for them. Patients need to know they have choices, and that they should take time to find the place and procedure that’s right for them.”

There are several types of bariatric surgery, each appropriate for different types of patients. The most common procedures include:

*Adjustable Gastric Banding (LapBand®)* which involves placing a silicone band or LapBand® around the upper part of the stomach to reduce the volume of food the stomach is able to hold and to increase the feeling of fullness.

*Gastric bypass* is currently the most popular procedure. Done either through laparoscopic or open surgery, it involves forming a small gastric pouch to restrict food intake and shortening the gastro-intestinal tract to reduce the absorption of food.

The Bariatric Surgery Program at Northwest Hospital offers a comprehensive and personalized approach. Patients participate in a multi-disciplinary weight-loss program, which includes nutritional, emotional and exercise counseling, as well as careful post-surgery medical follow-up and monitoring. The program also offers a support group for patients in all stages of the weight-loss surgery process, even those just beginning to research the procedure.

Whitmore, who had received clearance from her doctor to have the surgery, came for an extensive consultation with Dr. Chebli. They decided on a laparoscopic gastric bypass procedure. Whitmore then received a pre-operative checklist, which required a full range of tests, as well as consultation with a nutritionist and a psychological evaluation.

“I felt immediately comfortable with Dr. Chebli and the entire team,” says Whitmore. “Everyone was so nice and supportive and helpful. It was my first time ever having surgery, but Dr. Chebli walked me through every step of the process and told me everything I needed to know. He was very detailed and straightforward about what the program required.”

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## Cover Story Continued . . .

Post surgery, Whitmore's diet and eating habits have changed dramatically. For several weeks following her gastric bypass, she had to puree the food she ate. Even after returning to regular food, the amount she could eat was limited, so she had to be vigilant about eating enough protein and taking dietary supplements to ensure she was getting proper nutrition. "It took a while to figure out what I could eat and how much, especially when I ate out, but now, a year out from my surgery, it feels normal."

"I worked really hard at changing my life. Surgery is a tool, but you can't rely on the procedure alone or your weight loss won't be successful for you. It's not an easy way out. If you're thinking about this kind of surgery, you need to research and talk to people who have had it before. You need to prepare yourself to work at it every day."

Whitmore says all the hard work has been worth it. In the year since her surgery, she has lost 140 pounds – more than 81% of her excess body weight, and much more than the 70% excess weight loss that is the national average.

Many people don't even recognize the slim, athletic woman she has become. "People who knew me before my weight loss do a lot of double takes. I'm getting used to the idea of being attractive all over again," she laughs.

Whitmore has poured her new-found energy into sports and outdoor activities. She plays on a softball team, hikes, bikes, skis and runs. Currently, she is training for a 5K and plans to run another 10K in the fall.

Chebli says Katie's above-average weight loss has been outstanding, but is not all that unusual for patients in the program. "Our team is tremendously dedicated to each person's success and we take a lot of time with each patient that comes to us. There are no shortcuts. The program is rigorous and comprehensive, but always in the best interest of our patients. These are things we feel strongly about and, as a result, our patients enjoy better outcomes with fewer complications."

"I've had nothing but positives," says Whitmore, whose friends, family and students call her inspiring. "All of the restrictions and limitations on my life have been lifted and I am truly experiencing freedom to do what I want to do, to try new things and to really live the life I was meant to live."

For more information on obesity, visit [www.northwestobesitysurgery.com](http://www.northwestobesitysurgery.com) or [www.obesityhelp.com](http://www.obesityhelp.com). For more information on the Bariatric Surgery Program at Northwest Hospital, or to register for a free informational seminar, call (206) 368-1350 (outside of Seattle, call (877) 839-8916) or visit [www.nwhospital.org](http://www.nwhospital.org).



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***-Katie Whitmore, Bariatric Surgery Patient***

## Race for The Cure - June 16<sup>th</sup>

@ Qwest Field

Join the Seattle Breast Center and Northwest Hospital Team in The Komen Race for the Cure. Register online by May 11 at [www.komenpugetsound.org](http://www.komenpugetsound.org).

## Northgate Festival - August 11-12<sup>th</sup>

@ Northwest Hospital OPMC

Third annual family Northgate Festival, at OPMC: Health fair, senior area, free rides and activities for kids, continuous entertainment on the music stage, commercial and art exhibits, arts and crafts booths, food, roving clowns and much more! Free parking and admission.

## Music Appreciation Week - August 13-17<sup>th</sup>

@ Northwest Hospital

Fourth annual Music Appreciation Week with daily live performances from a wide array of local talent, including jazz, rock and classical musicians. Be ready to listen from noon to 1:30 p.m. daily, outside the Cafeteria Solarium on the Northwest Hospital Main Campus.



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