

Does this

Clothes & the Weight Loss Surgery Patient

by Barbara Thompson

I couldn't wait to have those wonderful shopping experiences like the girls do on "Sex in the City." You know what I mean, you spend the day with some girlfriends, and you walk into a department store, into the regular sized section, and everything you try on looks wonderful on you. Or you have to yell out of the dressing room, "Sorry, but do you have this in a smaller size?" Is that not every woman's fantasy?

So why was I having clothing problems after I lost weight following my surgery? I was fine as I worked my way down through the sizes in the "plus" size stores. But when I found that those were now too big, I realized I needed to face the intimidating world of "regular" sized stores.

After years of being made to feel like I didn't belong in department stores, going into these stores was more of an ordeal than I anticipated. I still saw myself as very heavy. But the size that was right for me could only be found in a "regular" store. But would the sales ladies still look at me like I was there to buy a gift or gently ask me if I was lost? Would they assume that I got turned around and wandered out of the "women's" department like an escapee from a zoo?

And what stores should I go into? Where were the styles and sizes to be found now? I knew where to park my car in the mall lot when I shopped at the "plus" sized stores. Where would I park and what direction would I head now? The whole idea kept me in clothes far too large for me, for too long, because the whole ordeal was too much for me to deal with.

So what is a person to do on the journey down to your ideal weight? One tip is to go through your closet and sort your clothes by size from the largest to smallest. Most of us have been through many sizes and still have those smaller clothes in a closet. We have been praying



make me look...

for the day when we could get back into them. Well that day is here! However, I found that the clothes that I had been holding onto in hopes of fitting into one day were now hopelessly out of date.

I was determined to eliminate those clothes that were too large, but I found that it was no easy task. This is very hard to do because we still have the fear that we will regain our weight. After all, we are accustomed to yoyo dieting. Can I really throw away that expensive dress when maybe I will fit back into it a few months from now? Do I trust myself and this surgery enough to let go

of those sizes? As unnecessary as it was, I admit to secretly keeping some "insurance" clothes just in case I regained weight.

Parting with my "comfort clothes" was especially difficult. My "comfort clothes" were those baggy bulky jersey clothes that stretched with me as I grew, but somehow still felt so cozy. Everything in my life was changing so fast that I needed those clothes that made me feel safe. My comfort clothes were my uniform separating me from the rest of the world. Those clothes were now falling off me. It was hard to give them up.

tips

Sandy O'Brien of Plover, Wisconsin offered the following tips, "Buying clothes after weight loss surgery can be frustrating as well as fun. First of all, it is exciting to buy clothes in sizes that we have not worn in years. The frustrating part is that the new clothes may only last you a few months."

Here are my tips for post-op shopping:

- Take a good look at the existing things in your closet. There are probably things that you have not been able to get into for a while. Wear those first. Try to make those last as long as you can.
- Buy a few basic things. Buy the slacks that can be worn with 2 or 3 tops. Try to get away with fewer clothes, and save your money for future shopping sprees.
- Some of my family members were willing to let me borrow some items for a couple of months.
- Try to shop in second hand or consignment shops. You can drop off your large clothes and look for bargains in your current size. Check out Goodwill or other charity stores.
- Many support groups have clothing exchanges. If your group does not have a clothing exchange, consider starting one.

And I hadn't realized that cost would also be such a factor. Even though my insurance covered all of my surgical costs, they weren't about to finance the multiple new wardrobes I would need.

So what do you do to get through this transition period as your body is changing so fast? Family and friends sometimes come to your rescue. "Thank goodness for my friend Debby, who kept me in clothing all the way from size 18 down to size 12 in the first year after my surgery," says Mary Ellen Olbrisch of Richmond, Virginia. "After that, I was on my own."

Bernadette Smith of Washington, DC also found the answer to her clothing problems in consignment stores. "I had surgery on September 2nd and have lost 65 pounds so far. I feel so much better and can hardly wait to lose more. Clothes are a big issue. I don't really want to buy new clothes and spend all that money, so I ventured into a local consignment shop. I made out great and did not have to spend a lot of money for new clothes. I bought 3 very nice suits, 3 pairs of pants, 3 or 4 blouses and a skirt with the store tag still on it. I spent only \$55.00 for all of that. I paid \$6 or \$7 for suits that look brand new. As I lose more weight, I plan to shop in thrift stores. Who knows, I may continue to do that when I reach my goal."

Sunni Boehme, of Global Goddess Fashions.com is an expert who helps women find their most flattering clothes. She advises women as they are losing weight to look for clothes that are flexible and forgiving. During that time when the weight is falling off, look for clothes that will shrink with you so that you can avoid shifting to different sizes. She recommends looking for fabrics with a spandex and lycra combination that makes you look good, as well as feel good. Heavier women are traditionally afraid of lycra because it clings. But this is material that is not clinging. The material is slinky and drapes well.

When we do reach our goal weight, we may end up with a body type much different than when we started our journey, especially if we have had plastic surgery. But will we know how to find our most flattering fashions for our own body type? Often we are neophytes when it comes to fashion because we have not concentrated on it; instead, directing our attention to clothes that cover or tent our bulges.

“There are 4 body types; apple, tee, pear and straight up and down. Discover your own body type by having a friend help you determine your type now that you have lost weight.”

Being of normal weight we can now look for clothes that make the most of our new bodies. There are 4 body types; apple, tee, pear and straight up and down. Discover your own body type by having a friend help you determine your type now that you have lost weight. Remember, that we see ourselves through eyes influenced by our previous size and shape which is different from the current reality. Have someone take a full length picture of you and study that. You will have a better sense of your shape than if you glance at yourself in a mirror.

"Different styles look good on each type," says Sunni Boehme. "The apple shape is thick around the middle. Apple shapes should never wear short tops which come to the waist. Even if it fits and is on sale, don't buy it. What looks best are shirts and jackets that come to the top of the thigh. Apples also look best in 3/4 length sleeves. The tee shirt tops with the sleeves cut above the elbow are not for apples."

"Tee shapes have large shoulders and narrower hips and legs. Tee shapes should never wear long jackets. A mid hip jacket looks best with the jacket open in the front. Tee shapes tend to wear pants that are too tight because they have good legs, but that just emphasizes their large tops. Tees should never wear leggings. Flared pants look the best."

"The pear shape is larger on the bottom. Accent your top with a bright color. Ideally have the yolk in a different color. Pear shapes look better in skirts rather than pants."

"Straight up and down is evenly proportioned. These are the people that have the classic shape of runway models. This shape is also who designers make clothes for, so you have a lot to work with. If anything, they tend to need a padded bra. To accentuate their classic figure, a belt worn around the hips looks terrific. This shape is usually reserved for post tummy tuck."

The world of fashion awaits us after surgery. Trust your family and friends as they tell you how great you look and find fashions that accentuate the new you. You deserve it. ■



Barbara Thompson is the author of the popular patient guidebook, "Weight Loss Surgery: Finding the Thin Person Hiding Inside You," recognized as the "unofficial bible of bypass patients." She is a nationally known speaker, and sponsors the patient www.wlscenter.com

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