

A Lap-band[®] Revolution

*Dr.. Davtyan's Personal
WLS Journey*



David G. Davtyan
MD, FACS, FICS

by Niloo E Sarabi

Dr. Davtyan, a prominent and respected bariatric surgeon in Beverly Hills, is at the forefront of the battle against obesity. Specializing in the Lap-band system, he is not only one of the most knowledgeable surgeons currently performing the new and minimally invasive procedure but is also a Lap-band patient himself. "Having to struggle with weight problems throughout my life and seeing the positive effects of this great tool and made me a fighter for this cause," he says. "I try to speak out anytime and anywhere to raise awareness about obesity and the effectiveness of the Lap-band in combating this debilitating disease."

Although he was able to fight his genetic predisposition to obesity through exercise during the early years of his life, Dr. Davtyan started to experience progressive weight gain by the late 1980's. He had to keep up with a hectic timetable, which often meant 120 hours of work a week. "I am the kind of person who copes with stress by eating more, so I became overweight during my medical school years. I became obese during my surgery residency and eventually morbidly obese with a body mass index (BMI) of 35 by the time I completed my training." He graduated with honors from UCLA and was at the top of his surgical residency class, but the efforts he put into his training took a toll on his health. During his three-year Surgical Oncology Fellowship at MD Anderson Cancer Center at the University of Texas and John Wayne Cancer Institute in Los Angeles, he gained an additional 30 pounds. "It took me just a few years to get from a weight of 230 pounds to 260 pounds," Dr. Davtyan said. "This is fairly typical, as

obesity impacts one's metabolism by causing insulin resistance, which in turn accelerates the weight gain."

By the late 1990's, Dr. Davtyan had begun to consider bariatric surgery, but knowing the risks and complications made him hesitant. "I knew there were no effective medications to treat my obesity, as I needed meaningful weight loss of 50 pounds at the least, but I also knew that I was not going to have a drastic procedure like the gastric bypass either. Thus, my choice had been to accept my obesity, live with it and move on."

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In February 2001, while attending a conference on laparoscopic bariatric surgery, Dr. Davtyan met Dr. Guy-Bernard Cadiere, one of the surgeons who pioneered laparoscopic adjustable gastric banding. He learned about the remarkable safety and impressive results of the Lap-band from Dr. Cadiere and other world-renowned bariatric surgeons, including Dr..

George Fielding and Dr. Peter O'Brien. He was particularly impressed with the safety of the procedure, which does not permanently alter the anatomy of the digestive system and is reversible. The procedure is performed laparoscopically and involves placing an inflatable band around the upper part of the stomach, creating a small pouch with a narrow outlet. This limits the capacity of the stomach and causes it to feel full after ingesting small amounts of food. Once implanted, the band can be adjusted in the doctor's office in a matter of minutes. It can be tightened to increase the weight loss, or loosened when needed, such as during pregnancy or periods of illness. Over the next few months, Dr. Davtyan solidified his decision to have the surgery. In October 2001, he flew to Belgium to observe Dr. Cadiere perform several procedures, and to undergo his own. He assisted Dr. Cadiere in a number of Lap-band surgeries after his own procedure.

Within a few weeks of his operation, most of his obesity-related problems began to subside. His energy level increased and he continued to gradually lose weight. By the time he flew back to Belgium for his first adjustment a few months after his surgery, he had lost 25 pounds without feeling the discomfort of hunger, vomiting or nutritional deficiencies.

However, Dr. Davtyan was not alone on this journey. "This time I was accompanied by a few of my patients who had decided to have the operation," he said, "I was completely convinced of the benefits of the Lap-band and started to perform this procedure myself after returning to the United States."

During the two years following his surgery, Dr. Davtyan attended several courses in laparoscopic bariatric surgery given by Inamed and the American Society for Bariatric Surgery (ASBS), eventually becoming a member of the ASBS. Given his total commitment to help his patients win the battle against obesity, Dr. Davtyan expanded his expertise beyond bariatric surgery to include bariatric medicine. He became a member of the American Society of Bariatric Physicians and later passed the American Board of Bariatric Medicine (ABBM) certification examination.

Dr. Davtyan's training focused on obesity and cancer, and he sees many parallels between these two deadly diseases. "Both are chronic diseases that kill the patients in the long-run and maim them in the short-run. They both have multi-factorial causes; they require genetic predispositions and environmental influences. Also, they both require

multidisciplinary care before and after the surgery."

Dr. Davtyan understands the personal and emotional burdens of obesity and often draws on his own experiences to help his patients. He points out that there are social stigmas associated with obesity, and that in many communities, especially among ethnic minorities, obesity is not viewed as a disease.

Considering the advantages of the minimally invasive Lap-band, Dr. Davtyan believes that the existing criteria for having bariatric surgery, as established by the National Institutes of Health consensus conference (NIH) in 1991, needs to be re-evaluated, as they were developed in response to gastric bypass and the other more invasive bariatric surgical procedures: "Why do patients have to wait until they reach a BMI of 35 or 40 and develop diabetes before they can have the safe and effective Lap-band?" He also notes that the Lap-band can be safely considered for adolescent patients as well. "Surgeons have been cautious in performing gastric bypass surgery in younger patients because of its metabolic impact. However, the Lap-band is not associated with metabolic changes and maintains normal absorption of nutrients and vitamins, thus it represents a better long-term choice in younger individuals."

Having lost 80 pounds over the last four years, Dr. Davtyan considers himself a changed man, both physically and emotionally. As a patient himself, he can form closer relationships with his patients and is uniquely qualified to lead them to success. "Because I know where I get in trouble as a patient, I have learned how to better troubleshoot and to warn my patients," he says. "In order to learn, I experimented with my own band and I have perfected a protocol that I use in my patients as well."

Dr. Davtyan's personal experiences have also made him an advocate for obese patients and a crusader against obesity. "The Lap-band has completely changed my life, and there are millions of others who should also benefit from this remarkable medical breakthrough." For now, Dr. Davtyan, whose own life has been revolutionized by weight loss, continues to offer very practical help to others by providing them with the tools for weight loss success.

Dr. Davtyan's private practice is located at Cedars Sinai Medical Towers in Beverly Hills, CA. For more information, call 1-877-9BE-SLIM or visit www.LapBandLA.com

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