

Australians turn to surgery for weight loss

- CALLIE WATSON
- From: [The Advertiser](#)
- November 19, 2010



HAPPY: Michelle Kennedy had surgery on her stomach four years ago. Picture: SARAH REED *Source:* AdelaideNow

THOUSANDS more Australians are turning to surgery to lose weight compared with a decade ago.

An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, released today, shows 17,000 Australians underwent weight-loss procedures, including gastric bypasses and gastric banding, during 2008.

This compares with just 500 such operations in Australian hospitals in 1998.

Plastic surgeons say this trend is also reflected in private clinics, where a growing number of men and women are requesting liposuction for their stomachs, thighs, arms and necks for cosmetic reasons.

Australian Medical Association SA president Dr Andrew Lavender said the huge spike in weight-loss surgery numbers reflected the country's rising obesity rates.

He described such surgery as a "last resort".

"They should have tried all other measures to lose weight before such a move (surgery) is recommended by medical professionals," he said.

"It's all about a balanced diet and exercise, but for some people this isn't enough.

"We know gastric band reduction surgery is very safe and can be very effective, but it doesn't in itself deal with the obesity epidemic."

More women than men underwent weight loss surgery in 2008, despite figures showing the latter are more likely to be obese.

The most common surgery was having a laparoscopic adjustable gastric band fitted.

This device, placed around the stomach, compresses the stomach and reduces appetite.

The Institute's report, *Weight loss surgery in Australia*, found the average length of a hospital stay for a weight-loss procedure was just under two days.

SA Health figures show 104 weight-loss procedures were undertaken in South Australian public hospitals during 2009-10, with another 1222 in private hospitals.

Deakin University's Associate Professor Kylie Ball said the continued rise in obesity would place increasing pressure on the public health system.

During the 2007-08 financial year, the cost of hospital care for weight-loss procedures was about \$12.5 million in the public sector and \$96 million in the private sector.

About \$15.2 million in rebates was paid through the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

Medicare only provides rebates for surgery deemed "clinically relevant" by the GPs who treat patients, meaning cosmetic surgery is excluded.

Dr Ball said the key to beating the country's rising obesity rate was a "multi-strategy" approach.

"We need to look at transport, education, the workplace ... absolutely everything," she said.

A National Health Survey looking at figures from 2007-08 found 68 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women were overweight or obese.

In February, a major Australian study advocated an increase in the number of juvenile gastric banding operations to tackle the growing prevalence of morbidly overweight children.

Sydney plastic surgeon Gavin Sandercoe said patients wanted to shape their bodies, "and with that quite often comes weight loss".

At Adelaide's Epiclinic Cosmetic Medicine and Surgery, where customers requesting liposuction are mostly women aged between 20 and 60, business is booming.

Director Janelle Molton said while years ago no one would "dare talk about" liposuction, it was now considered a more appropriate procedure.

Meadows mother-of-two Michelle Kennedy, 44, had liposuction on her stomach four years ago.

"It wasn't necessarily about shedding the kilograms, it was about removing the fat I just couldn't get rid of," she said.

"I was going to the gym five times a week and it wasn't budging."