

## *Bariatric surgery can help morbidly obese people live more normal lives*

By Mitzi Perdue

**D**r. Mike Sofronski would like nothing better than to be out of work. Actually, he'd very much like to be employed, but he wishes the surgery he specializes in would no longer be needed. Sofronski is a bariatric surgeon at Peninsula Regional Medical Center in Salisbury and his job is to help people who are morbidly obese.

Simply put, bariatric surgeons close the stomach off, leaving only a small pouch for food. As a result, patients feel full on fewer calories. Surgeons may also reroute the small intestine to foil the digestive process, thereby decreasing the amount of calories absorbed.

The patients Sofronski sees are people who are 100 pounds or more above their ideal body weight, and every one of them has tried just about every diet there is. They're unable to lose weight because morbid obesity is a disease just as surely as diabetes and cancer are diseases.

### **Michael Sofronski's Wish List**

The general public would realize that morbid obesity is a disease. People who have this disease need understanding and they need to be treated with the same respect and caring as everyone else.

A person who is more than 100 pounds overweight has less than one chance in 100 of getting back to his or her ideal body weight. That is, unless there's surgical intervention which often would include a gastric bypass.

But why go to the extreme of actual surgery? Why not just get used to being heavy?

The answer is that being 100 pounds or more overweight is a lot more than just an appearance issue. A person who weighs 100



Times Photo by Brice Stump

**Bariatric surgeon Dr. Michael Sofronski of Peninsula Regional Medical Center helps people who are morbidly obese.**

pounds or more is exponentially more likely to have other problems including diabetes, respiratory and cardiac problems, joint

disease, arthritis and depression.

What can a person who has the surgery expect?

Here's Alice Hunter's experience. (And by the way, this is not her true name.)

"It's seven weeks after my surgery, and I feel great. I have more energy than I ever did before.

"I used to be hungry all the time, and I craved pizza, hamburgers, French fries, ice cream, candies and cake. I could eat a whole meal and still be starving an hour later. Now the cravings are altogether gone."

Hunter was in Dr. Sofronski's office recently and a patient who was there for the first time asked Hunter what she thought of the operation.

"It's the best thing I've ever done in my life," she answered. "It gave me back my life."

Sofronski will only perform the bariatric surgery on patients who are morbidly obese. For people who are heavy but not morbidly obese, diet and exercise are the approaches that he recommends.

Here are some of his weight loss tips:

■ Don't drink your calories. There are a lot of calories in milk, juice and sodas. For the calories you'd get in a typical 12-ounce soft drink, you could be eating three eggs, which

would be a lot more satisfying.

■ Eat only slow-burning carbohydrates, such as brown rice, oatmeal, whole wheat and sweet potatoes. Avoid fast-burning carbohydrates such as doughnuts, cakes, cookies, and white flour pasta or white flour bread.

■ Get most of your calories before 3 p.m. Most Americans get it backwards consuming the most calories at dinner.

If you've decided to embark on a weight loss program, and you'd like rewards, incentives, discounts and support, Dr. Sofronski recommends that you sign up for the Healthy U program. Look in the Style section of Monday's Daily Times for information on locations where you can enroll.



**"People Helping People" is devoted to extraordinary works performed by organizations on the Lower Shore. Mitzi Perdue is a freelance writer and businesswoman who lives in Salisbury.**