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Weight Loss Options: Bariatric Surgery vs. Medication-Assisted Weight Loss vs. Both

At Anchorage Bariatrics, we take a holistic view towards health and wellness, and strive to provide comprehensive weight loss solutions specifically tailored to each individual patient. This handout provides information to help you understand the differences between bariatric surgery and medication-assisted weight loss.

Key Facts:

- **Bariatric Surgery:**
 - Bariatric surgery involves minimally-invasive procedures that alter the digestive system to change the hormones involved in hunger and satiety (fullness).
 - The two main options are the sleeve gastrectomy and Roux-en-Y gastric bypass.
 - These often result in significant and sustained weight loss, and can lead to improvements or resolution of obesity-related conditions like type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and sleep apnea.
 - Bariatric surgery can lead to greater percentages of total weight loss, when compared to medication alone.
 - The average total body weight loss with the sleeve gastrectomy is 30% at one year after surgery, and with the Roux-en-Y gastric bypass is 32% at one year after surgery.
 - Long-term weight loss success: more than 90% of people who undergo bariatric surgery maintain at least 50% of their weight loss at 5 years after surgery.
 - While these surgical options may sound invasive and drastic, minimally invasive surgery makes these procedures much safer.
 - The ASMBS and IFSO (American and international bariatric surgery organizations) jointly recommended in 2022 that patients should be offered weight loss surgery at a lower BMI than previous guidelines, due to vast improvement in safety with surgery, and sustained results and health benefits after surgery.
 - The most common regret patients have after surgery is that they did not undergo surgery sooner.
- **Medication-Assisted Weight Loss:**
 - Medication-assisted weight loss involves the use of prescription medications to help regulate hunger and satiety, increase feelings of fullness, or increase metabolism.
 - These can be effective for weight loss, but the amount of weight loss varies depending on the medication, dose, and individual.
 - The most potent medication currently available, tirzepatide (also known as Mounjaro or Zepbound), can achieve weight loss as great as 21.2% at 9 months after starting the once weekly dose. Other medications do not have as pronounced of an effect on weight. For example, semaglutide (also known as Ozempic or Wegovy) can result in 15-17% total body weight loss after one year of once weekly injections.
 - Like all medications for chronic conditions, these medications must be taken continuously to be effective

- Stopping these medications (due to side-effects, cost, insurance coverage, or supply issues) often leads to regaining the lost weight.
- Medications can have side effects, and some patients are not able to tolerate the side effects.

- **Lifestyle Changes:**

- Both bariatric surgery and medication-assisted weight loss require a commitment to long-term lifestyle changes, including:
 - A healthy, balanced diet.
 - Regular physical activity.
 - Behavioral modifications to address eating habits and emotional eating.
- These changes are crucial for maximizing weight loss and maintaining long-term results, and are an integral component at Anchorage Bariatrics, supported by Dietitians of Alaska and Psychology Services of Alaska in the same office.

- **Combining Therapies:**

- In some cases, combining bariatric surgery and medication-assisted weight loss may be beneficial.
- This approach can potentially enhance weight loss and improve outcomes.
- This option should be discussed with your physician to determine if it is right for your specific situation.

- **Comparative Efficacy:**

- Studies have shown that bariatric surgery leads to greater and more sustained weight loss than medication alone.
- Bariatric surgery has also demonstrated greater effectiveness in improving or resolving obesity-related comorbidities. Especially with the Roux-en-Y gastric bypass, resolution of diabetes is often sustained even in the presence of weight regain.
- Medications are a less invasive option, and may be more suitable for individuals with lower BMI, or those who are not candidates for surgery.

- **Individualized Approach:**

- The best weight loss approach depends on individual factors, including:
 - BMI.
 - Overall health.
 - Personal preferences.
 - Risk factors.

- **References:**

- [ASMBS, ASMBS/IFSO guidelines, Fact sheet, NEJM](#)

