



*Gina Milligan*

# Weight-Loss Surgery: *Removing the Barriers*

**Most people don't look** forward to life's losses, but Gina Milligan could hardly wait. In fact, weight was the issue. Three years ago, Milligan weighed 299 pounds. Today, she weighs 136 pounds—a dramatic transformation that came about as a result of surgery performed at Methodist Hospital by Troy LaMar, MD, a specialist in bariatric (weight-related) surgery.

Speaking with Milligan, it takes only a few minutes to realize that pain—physical and psychological—dominated what she sees as her former life.

“I was a bystander in life,” she says. “It’s difficult to describe the pain cycle you’re in. Doing anything causes pain, so you don’t move around much or exercise because it hurts too much.”

“If I hadn’t done this,” she continues, “I am firmly convinced I would be dead now.” Bariatric surgery often has been seen as an act of vanity, a surgical solution for those who simply won’t control their desire to eat. In fact, says Dr. LaMar, it’s a matter of urgently needed health care.

“In terms of this being a cosmetic procedure, clearly it’s not,” he says. “Research that has followed literally thousands of patients shows that high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, asthma, sleep apnea, urinary stress incontinence and conception issues can be significantly improved or completely resolved. There is plenty of data showing we give people a chance to live longer and healthier lives.”

One of the people helping in that effort is bariatric coordinator Ella Andrews, RN. Her job involves patient education, starting pre-surgically and continuing through the post-surgical group meetings patients must attend. She echoes Dr. LaMar’s assessment about why people have bariatric surgery.

“The patients we see are not doing this for cosmetic reasons; they are doing it for health reasons,” she says. “They want to get better. They want to be healthier. They want to live longer for their children.”

Prior to her surgery, Milligan discovered that she’d lost the ability to conceive. “I was devastated,” she says. “I owed it to myself to lose the weight, but more importantly, I owed it to my family.” After losing the weight, she and her husband welcomed a healthy

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baby boy into the world. “My weight loss surgery required a total lifestyle change that wasn’t always easy, but Luke’s birth made it all worthwhile.”

Two surgical options are available for people who are morbidly obese—defined as being more than 100 pounds over their ideal weight with a body mass index of 40 or greater. Both procedures involve a long and careful screening process that qualifies people both physically and psychologically to assure they are suitable surgical candidates.

*Dr. Bengt Pehrsson, left, Dr. Troy LaMar and Dr. Asok Doraiswamy*

“Usually,” says Dr. LaMar, “patients have done a lot of homework. They tell us which procedure they want. Even so, we explain both options and talk about possible complications so that the choice they make will be the safest and healthiest for them.” Dr. LaMar and his bariatric surgery colleagues, Bengt Pehrsson, MD, and Asok Doraiswamy, MD, have performed more than 1,500 laparoscopic bariatric procedures at Methodist, making the hospital one of the leading centers in the region.

“There is no magic in this,” says Dr. LaMar. “We give patients a tool. If they use this tool for the rest of their lives, it will work for the rest of their lives.”

Gina Milligan is using that tool every day.

“My life is outstanding,” she says. “Now you’d have a hard time getting me to sit still.” In addition to being an actress and model, Milligan has found the energy to start Milligan Stew, a business that makes infant carriers.

“Yes, you have to work at it,” Milligan says. “This isn’t a miracle cure. You have to make major modifications in your life. But I wanted these results more than anything.”

She got them.



## Bariatric Recognition

Methodist Hospital has been recognized for its excellence in bariatric surgery by both professional organizations and insurers.

These include:

American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery—*Bariatric Surgery Center of Excellence*

Blue Cross—*Bariatric Surgery Center of Expertise*

CIGNA—*Certified Hospital for Bariatric Surgery*

Health Net of California—*Designated Bariatric Surgery Program*

## Body Mass Index (BMI)

Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat, based on height and weight. There are many easy-to-use online calculators (such as the one at <http://www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/>) that do the math.

As an example, a person who is 5 feet 9 inches tall would be considered underweight (BMI less than 18.5) if he or she weighs 124 pounds or less, normal weight at 125 to 168 pounds (BMI 18.5-24.9), overweight at 169 to 202 pounds (BMI of 25-29.9) and obese at 203 pounds or more (BMI of 30 or more). For adults age 20 or older, BMI guidelines are the same for men and women.

## To Learn More

*For more information on the weight loss surgery program, visit our Web site at [www.methodisthospital.org](http://www.methodisthospital.org).*

