

A Costly Choice, Weight-Loss Surgery Wrecks Woman's Health

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July 20, 2004— Loren Root has gone from one weight extreme to another, and she's scared her fragile health is about to fail.

"I'm dying," said Root, 52, of California, who weighs just 87 pounds. "And I've been in constant pain for the last 2 ½ years." At that time, Root weighed 330 pounds and she underwent gastric bypass surgery to shrink her stomach and cut the absorption of food in her intestine. But she couldn't stop losing weight after the operation.

"I lost 200 pounds in the first year," she said on Good Morning America. "I was very sick. I had all kinds of internal problems. I've been in the hospital over 30 times in the last 2 ½ years."

During surgery, Root's doctor separated her stomach from her esophagus (the tube that carries food from the mouth) and created a tiny stomach — a pouch — that was then attached to the lower part of her small intestine. The pouch is about 1 ½ tablespoons in size, thus cutting the amount of food absorption. A ring was put around the pouch to slow the food intake so that Root would feel full after just a few bites.

"Yeah, you feel full, but for me," she said, "I'll throw it up, or I'll just get nauseous."

A Mystery

Root and her doctors don't know what's wrong with her body, and she now regrets going into the surgery without asking enough questions. "[I] didn't do any research or any investigation or anything, like a dummy," she said.

Root's weight wasn't a problem while she was growing up in Los Angeles. But after a divorce that left her raising a son on her own, she packed on the pounds and lost her job as a legal secretary.

"I would use food as, you know, a comfort," she said. "I would find myself, you know, staring in — opening the refrigerator and just staring into it. You find yourself doing that and eating."

Her parents worried about her health. "She'd stay in the house and watch TV and eat candy," said her father, Mitch Root. A Quick Fix

Root said she thought bypass surgery was a quick fix and was impressed that celebrities had it done. She's not alone — 150,000 people are expected to undergo gastric bypass

surgery this year.

When she dropped too much weight, Root dropped her bypass surgeon as well. Because she barely holds down any food, she's now being nourished intravenously at UCLA Medical Center, where she is being treated by another doctor.

"Her intestine is not working and cannot absorb any nutrient," said Dr. Ian Yip. "We put a small catheter through the arm into a vein near her heart, and we feed her nutrient into her vein directly into her body."

Surgeons hope that if and when Root increases her weight to 120 pounds, they can open her up to change the bypass surgery. But while her doctor is optimistic, he is also realistic about how difficult it will be for her to gain enough weight for surgery.

"She's dying of slow starvation," Yip said. "Hopefully, we can get her health back."
Regrets and Hope

"All I want to do is be a normal person — that's all," Root said, crying.

Her mother, Penny Root, said through sobs, "We'd like to see a smile on her face again." Her father added, "It's rough on the kid — [she'll] always be our kid."

Yip said not all gastric bypass patients are the same — especially those who can afford the best medical care. "Celebrities in general have a different support than a common person," he said. "And I truly believe this surgery should be a last resort."

Root wishes she could turn back time. "I would've researched. I would've talked to people," she said. "You can find these support groups, you can go on the Internet."

"People need to know that there's a really bad side to this procedure," she said. "Death." A fund has been set up in Loren Root's name: Commercial Capital Bank 19300 Ventura Blvd. Tarzana, Ca., 91356 Bank contact: Chris Escalante 818-996-3311