

UCSF Pediatric Bariatric Surgery Mental Health Evaluation Guidelines

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess for mental health diagnoses that could interfere with a patient's success after bariatric surgery. For example, if a patient has a history of depression, presents with symptoms of clinical depression, and is not currently undergoing treatment, we recommend that the mood disorder be addressed before proceeding with surgery.

Rarely, patients have serious contraindications for surgery, such as active suicidal ideation, hallucinations and/or delusions, or severe cognitive impairment. Their impaired functioning would inhibit their ability to appreciate what they are agreeing to and to comply with the necessary behavioral demands.

In light of the tremendous medical and psychosocial benefits that can be achieved with bariatric surgery, evaluators must be cautious in recommending restrictions on patient access to surgery, while balancing this caution with vigilance for overt signs that may indicate potential difficulties.¹

REFERENCES:

Snyder, A. Psychological Assessment of the Patient Undergoing Bariatric Surgery. *The Ochsner Journal*, 2009. 9:144–148.

Important topics to address in mental health evaluation:

- **Weight management:**
 - How long has the patient been overweight?
 - What measures has the patient taken in the past to achieve weight loss? What are their perceptions of successes/disappointments related to previous attempts at weight loss?
- **Mental Health History:**
 - Patient identified sources of stress
 - Any depression, anxiety, suicidal tendencies, or eating disorders experienced by the patient? Current or previous treatment sought?
 - Any current or recent psychotropic medications, psychotherapy, or professional services? Is the patient compliant and amenable to continuing treatments?
 - Any untreated or incompletely treated condition that may interfere with successful bariatric surgery?
- **In summary:**
 - Are there any mental health contraindications to surgery?
 - Patient is likely to be compliant with required postoperative medical follow-up, diet changes, exercise, and vitamin regimen.
 - Patient understands that noncompliance puts him/her at risk of complications, nutritional deficiencies, and poor weight loss.

Instructions for the provider performing the evaluation:

- The evaluation must contain wording that **deems the patient safe** for bariatric surgery from a mental health perspective to satisfy surgery and insurance requirements.
- Please submit your evaluation of the patient in clinical note or documentation format; a clearance letter is **NOT** considered sufficient documentation by insurance.

Example Assessments:

- Based on my examination, it is my impression that the patient is an acceptable candidate for bariatric surgery from a psychiatric perspective. The patient does not meet the diagnostic criteria for a mood, anxiety, eating, cognitive, substance use, or psychotic disorder.
- The patient's history is consistent with the diagnosis/diagnoses of _____. These conditions are: in remission/adequately managed/would not be expected to interfere with the patient's ability to undergo bariatric surgery or adhere to post-operative lifestyle changes/can be managed with the interventions noted below.
- In light of these considerations, the patient does not have any psychiatric contraindications to undergoing bariatric surgery. Further, the patient does not demonstrate evidence of any psychiatric issues that would interfere with the ability to adhere to post-procedure lifestyle changes.