

MEDIA RELEASE

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RAPID WEIGHT LOSS LINKED TO GALLSTONES

Flinders Medical Centre researchers have shown that rapid weight loss impairs gall bladder function and contributes to gallstone formation.

The research indicates that people who lose more than 1.7 percent of their bodyweight per week are 10 times as likely to form gallstones.

‘Cholesterol gallstone disease has an association with obesity. Rapid weight loss from dieting and surgery compounds this risk,’ said Professor Jim Toouli from the Department of Surgery at Flinders.

‘For the first time, we now know the optimal rate of weight loss to avoid gallstone formation. Adjustable gastric banding inserted by keyhole surgery can regulate weight loss to ensure the rate of reduction doesn’t exceed 1.7 percent of body weight per week.’

The study monitored the gall bladder activity of 14 patients who were scheduled for gastric laparoscopic banding surgery to treat medical obesity. It was conducted by Dr Bilal Al -Jiffry, a Surgeon from Saudi Arabia, as part of his PhD at Flinders.

Six weeks after surgery, the obese patients lost an average of 1.4 percent of their body weight per week. Three patients who had lost more than 1.7 percent of their bodyweight per week developed gallstones.

‘This occurred because the rapid weight loss following gastric banding also reduced gall bladder emptying, eventually leading to gallstone formation in the three individuals. The effect of the banding has previously been unknown,’ Professor Toouli said.

At six months after surgery, weight loss had slowed amongst the obese patients and no further gallstones developed. Gallstones disappeared in one of the three patients because her gall bladder emptying improved from 56 percent to 67 percent and her weight loss reduced to 0.33 percent of body weight per week.

The research was recently recognised in the top 10 percent of all papers submitted to the Digestive Diseases Week conference held in San Francisco. The conference, which is the world’s largest gathering of clinicians, educators and researchers in gastrointestinal and hepatic disease and function is attended by more than 15,000 delegates each year.

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Professor Toouli said about 20 percent of the Australian population develop gallstones during their life. Of this 20 percent, a further 20 percent will need treatment – usually resulting in removal of the gall bladder.

‘Approximately 30 percent of people with symptomatic gallstones develop pancreatitis, which can be a life threatening condition,’ he said.

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