



*Wendi Comello: Before weight loss surgery*

Weight loss surgery is generally designed for those with a body mass index (BMI) equal to or greater than 40, or equal to or greater than 35 with serious co-morbidities. Weight loss procedures are considered safe, but like many types of medical intervention, they do have risks. Consult with your physician about the risks and benefits of weight loss procedures. For more information, visit [stlukes-stl.com/mynewself](http://stlukes-stl.com/mynewself) or call St. Luke's Des Peres Hospital's MyNewSelf program at 314-966-9640.



LETTERS TO LUKE'S

# My Weight Loss Roller Coaster

By Wendi Comello

I remember my first diet when I was 7; the constant visits with nutritionists and weight loss clinics. I remember I couldn't eat normal kid food without feeling shame. My mother was a fitness instructor - lean, fit and beautiful - so why did I turn out to be the chunky kid? I lived my adult life struggling back and forth between self-acceptance and self-loathing. I would continue riding the weight loss roller coaster of diets that would ultimately fail, weight loss pills that made me sick and exercise programs I couldn't stick to because they hurt.

Although my doctor visits indicated that though I was morbidly obese and in my 40s, my blood pressure was normal and there were no signs of diabetes... yet. But at 45 years old and almost 400 pounds, I knew I was living on borrowed time, so I got serious. I realized that I had to make a permanent change if I wanted to be on this earth to watch my daughter grow up. So I researched all the different forms of weight loss surgery and decided to find a doctor who could perform a Vertical Sleeve Gastrectomy.

After extensive research, I selected and met with Dr. Darin Minkin, the medical director of the St. Luke's Des Peres Hospital's MyNewSelf program. During the pre-operative process, I was diagnosed with fatty liver disease. My reason for making such a permanent change just got real. Shortly thereafter, I had a gall bladder attack at work and was rushed into emergency surgery to have my gall bladder removed. The surgeon again told me I had not only fatty liver disease, but my liver was inflamed and infected. The occasional swelling in my legs and feet were now becoming permanent and the pain in my legs never stopped. It was like the universe was sending me signs so that I wouldn't back out of the weight loss surgery. I had my laparoscopic Vertical Sleeve Gastrectomy on July 7, 2016. It might as well have been my birthday.

My surgery experience was great and it didn't take long for me to recover. I was back to work pretty quickly and watched the pounds fall off. But of course, I kept waiting for this weight loss endeavor to fail. Since everything else I had tried failed, I was sure this

would too. But here I am now, 175 pounds lighter and I can move again. Exercise doesn't hurt. My fatty liver disease is gone and my ankles and feet aren't swollen any longer. I can also shop anywhere - this is such a big change that I found tears falling down my face at a recent trip to the mall. I realized that I could walk into any store and pick up something on a rack and it would fit; even in the stores my teenage daughter was shopping in! For the first time in my life, all the stores in the mall were for me too, not just the accessory and candle stores. I finally belonged in what I considered a "normal" society.

As I look back, I didn't realize all the things I did differently because I was obese. I didn't fly because I couldn't fit in the seat, so every trip was a road trip. I sat in the front seat of friends' cars, because the seatbelts in the back never fit. I automatically chose places to go and restaurants based on the seating. I avoided places with excessive standing, stairs or hills to climb. Those days are now over. I can go anywhere and do anything; I can even fit on all the rides at Six Flags! My stamina shocks me daily and the changes I have experienced would take me days to write down.

If there was one message I want others to know about this process, it is that it is never too late to start over. I am now 47 and feel like I am 27. Thanks to Dr. Minkin and the wonderful staff at MyNewSelf, I have a new life. I am ready for anything so bring on the next adventure!

*This testimonial reflects results achieved by this patient. As each case must be independently evaluated and managed, actual weight loss will vary and we cannot guarantee any particular result.*

Do you have an inspirational story about taking control of your health? Send us a letter! Our #LettersToLukes campaign allows us to share our stories to celebrate accomplishments and motivate one another to live our healthiest, best life! Letters can be sent to [spiritofwomen@stlukes-stl.com](mailto:spiritofwomen@stlukes-stl.com).